DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 292 EC 309 115

AUTHOR	Kysilko, David, Ed.
TITLE	Special Education: Does It Fit with Standards-Based Reform?
INSTITUTION	National Association of State Boards of Education, Alexandria, VA.
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	54p.; Theme issue. Published quarterly. For Volume 2, Number 2, see ED 465 429.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Association of State Boards of Education, 277 South Washington Street, Suite 100, Alexandria, VA 22314 ($35 for 1-year subscription; $60 for 2-year subscription; $2 for single issue plus $2 shipping and handling). Tel: 703-684-2000; Fax: 703-836-2313; Web site: http://www.nasbe.org.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	State Education Standard; v2 n3 Aut 2001
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; *Accountability; Agency Cooperation; *Disabilities; Early Childhood Education; Early Intervention; *Educational Assessment; Educational Change; Educational Legislation; Educational Testing; Elementary Secondary Education; *Federal Legislation; *Inclusive Schools; Partnerships in Education; Preschool Education; Regular and Special Education Relationship; Special Education; Student Evaluation; Student Participation
IDENTIFIERS	*Georgia; *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; New York

ABSTRACT

This issue focuses on how special education fits into standards-based reform and contains the following featured articles: (1) "A New Vision for Special Education Accountability" (Martha L. Thurlow and Jane L. Krentz) charts the change in special education accountability as it moves from the old focus on Individualized Education Program teams; (2) "Challenge and Change of IDEA '97" (Edward Roeber and Ken Warlick) looks at the challenges involved in including all students with disabilities in statewide assessment programs; (3) "Beginning Journeys: A New Vision for Early Childhood Education" (Mary Beth Bruder) presents a new model for providing early childhood services to young children with disabilities; (4) "The Door to Opportunity: Let's Open It for Everyone" (Lawrence C. Gloeckler) reviews the positive results of including students with disabilities in the New York State Regents exam; (5) "Everybody WINS!" (Toni Strieker and Kent Logan) describes the goal of Project WINS to build the capacity of Georgia schools to educate all students within a standards-based environment; (6) "Supporting Staff in Inclusive Schools" (Gail McGregor) details ways schools can be restructured to help teachers and other staff work successfully with all students in an inclusive setting; and (7) "The IDEA Partnerships" (Joanne Cashman and Elizabeth Laflin) describes how a national strategy for engaging the major membership organizations is working to foster understanding and improve results in the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (Each article include references.) (CR)

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ED 467 292

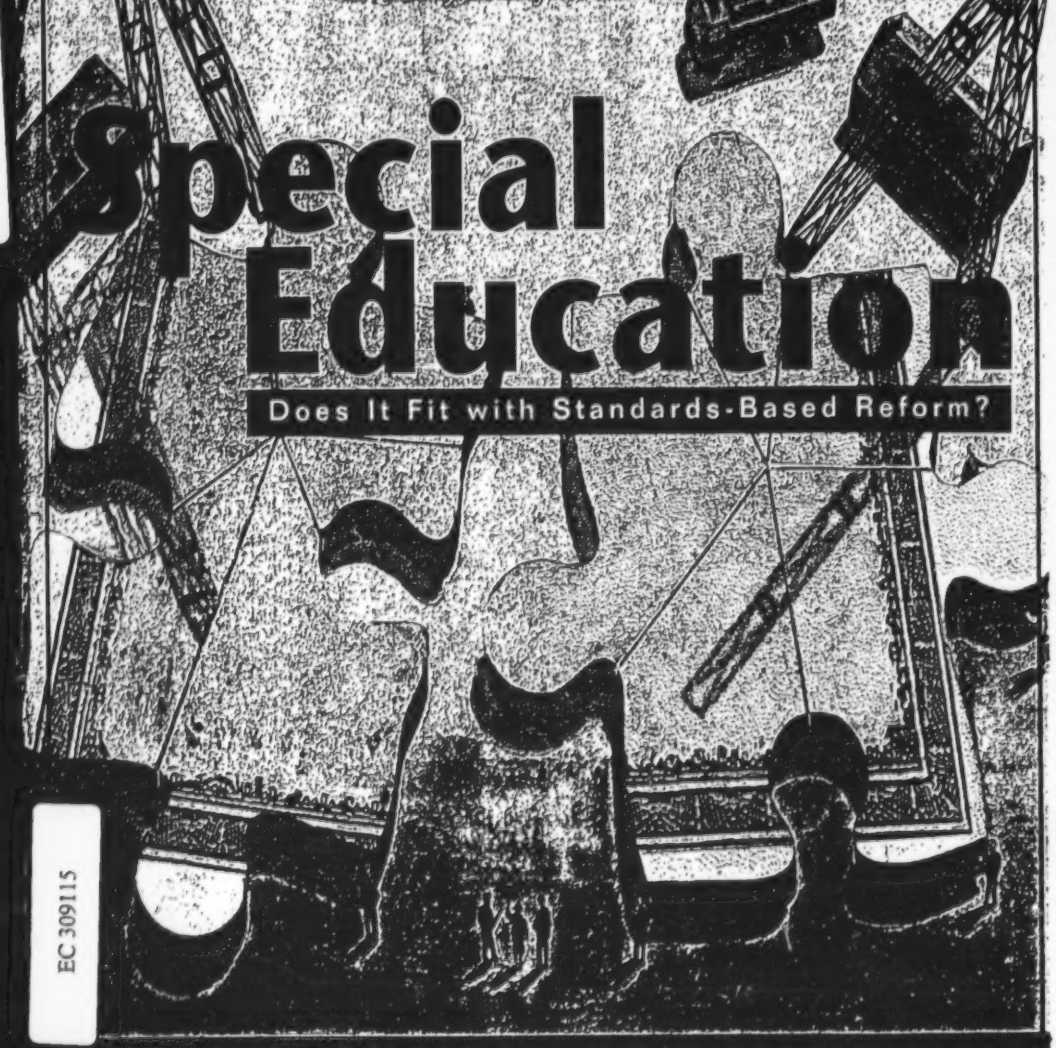
The State Education Standard

Autumn 2001

The Quarterly Journal of the National Association of State Boards of Education

Special Education

Does It Fit with Standards-Based Reform?



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A new vision for special education accountability Alternate assessments for students with disabilities Including students with disabilities in New York's Regents exams

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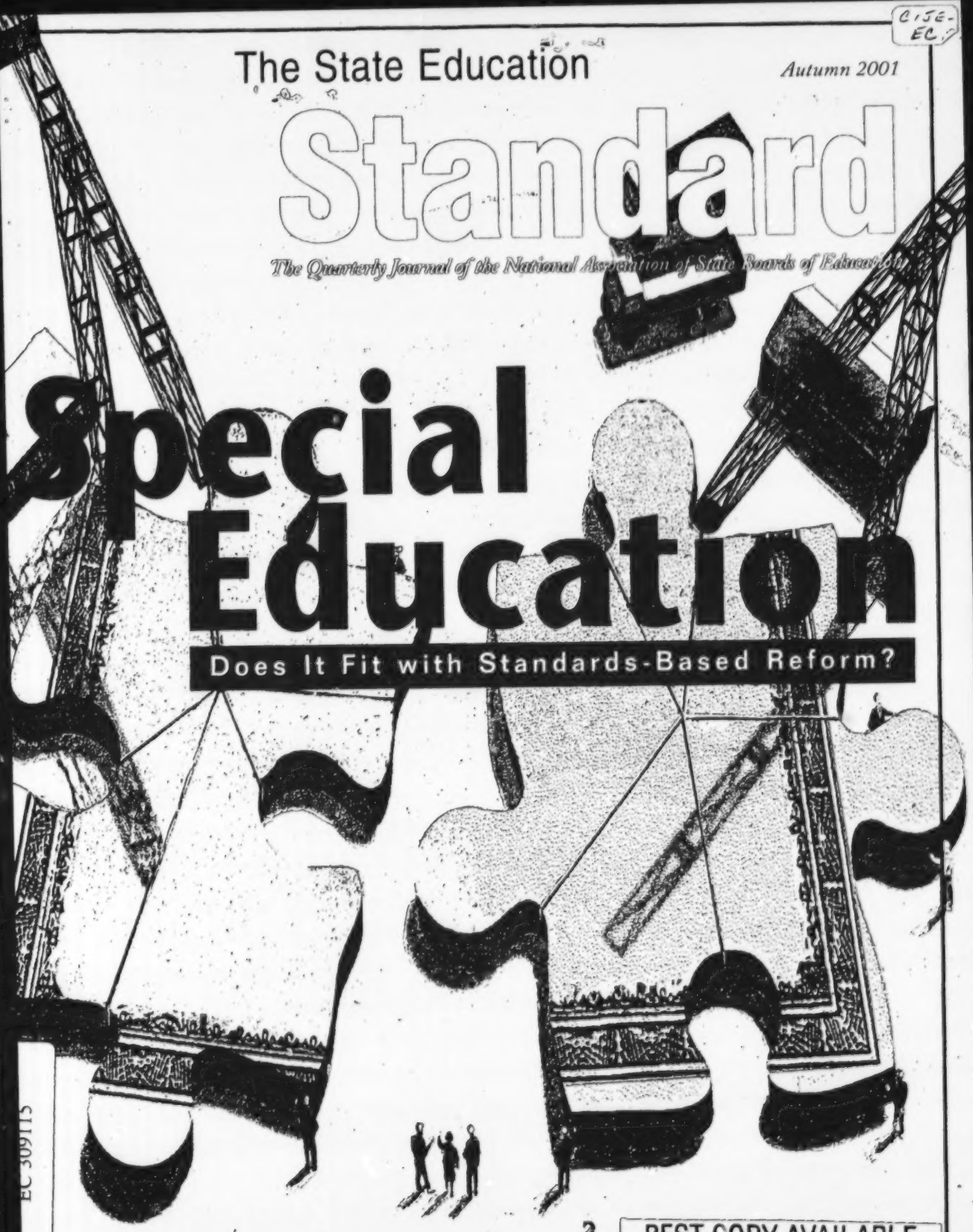

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Editor's Note

As we reflected on the specific theme that would underlie this issue's focus on the broad topic of special education, developing a tag line for the cover seemed to present more problems than usual. Over the last several years, NASBE projects, reports, and conference sessions have concentrated on the relationship between special education and general education reform, so we wanted to go for a different angle. We tried "Special Ed: Is It Taking over General Education?" We considered "Special Education: Who's Going to Pay?" We even looked at: "What's So Special about Special Education?"

But the truth is, when we really looked at the bulk of the policy development and implementation that is going on in states today around the issue of special education, we saw that it focuses on public accountability, curriculum standards, and inclusion, all of which are at the heart of efforts to ensure that students with disabilities get a rich, standards-based curriculum and that schools and districts are held accountable for the results of all students. The questions today are not whether special education will fully be a part of general education reforms, but how well these two very large organizational structures will fit together, and then what needs to be done to ensure that the fit is as seamless as possible as far as the students are concerned.

All of these themes are addressed by the articles in this quarter's *Standard*. Thurlow and Krentz take the broad view of special education accountability as it moves from the private world of ensuring that a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals are met to the public world of standards-based accountability. Roeber and Warlick look more specifically at how students with disabilities are being included in state assessments, with a particular examination of the array of alternate assessments being used by states today. Gloeckler, who is New York's director of special education, recounts his state's positive experience of including students with disabilities in the Regents exam.

In "Everybody WINS," Strieker and Logan describe Project WINS, a Georgia initiative designed to build schools' capacity to successfully educate "an increasingly diverse student population, including those with disabilities," in a standards-based environment. McGregor then pinpoints some of the specific staffing models and organizational structures that can help support school staff who are working in inclusive schools. Bruder's article takes a look at interventions for young children with disabilities in day care and preschool, particularly those intervention models that incorporate the widest possible range of settings in which young children learn.

Finally, Cashman and Laflin report on the four IDEA Partnerships, a federal project charged with helping national organizations assist in the implementation of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), focusing especially on the Policymakers Partnership, which includes NASBE, state legislators, school administrators, and other membership organizations.

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The State Education
Standard
Volume 2, Number 3 Autumn 2001

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Executive Summary

Brenda Lilienthal Welburn, Executive Director

In 1992, the NASBE membership declared that every child and every student coming into the public school system must be taught and challenged. *Winners All: A Call for Inclusive Schools* was the landmark NASBE study group report that affirmed that every child—regardless of disabling condition—was a winner capable of achieving in school and contributing to society, even if in non-traditional ways. As we approach the 10th anniversary of this publication, we are gratified with the progress that has been made toward addressing the major recommendations of the report, including improving the quality of special education, expanding the inclusion of special needs students in the regular classroom, enhancing the capacity of all educators to work with children with diverse needs, and reducing the over-identification of students of color in special education. And while those issues haven't been completely resolved, new issues are now confronting the policymaking community that could threaten the headway that has been made.

Accountability is one of the most portentous issues confronting special education today. State accountability systems are having a significant impact on the field of special education as systems develop instructional strategies to prepare all students, including most in special education, for state assessments. There is concern among education leaders that students who are classified with special needs present the greatest challenges to demonstrating success in setting high standards and accountability measures for students and to ensuring that all students meet those standards. The way in which policymakers support special needs students in accountability plans could reinforce or undermine the entire standards-based reform effort. It most certainly will impact the quality of services provided to special education students.

Making sense and making use of special education in today's environment of standards-based education presents challenges to state policymakers to promulgate rules and regulations to ensure that students are given the opportunity to utilize their strengths to reach their fullest potential. States are holding local systems accountable for all students, which means states must provide support to local systems to address the unique needs of students. States must provide adequate support while avoiding the temptation to provide waivers so broad as to classify every unique student as a special exemption. Such action could revert the system back to what it was before calls like *Winners All* were issued to raise the level of commitment to special education students.

Every day, children with special gifts and special needs come through the doors of the nation's schools. Sometimes, we confuse the needs with the gifts. To do so means we fail to cultivate the gifts, overcompensate for the needs, and neglect to recognize that it truly is possible for all children to reach a high level of learning. Fortunately, in more and more communities across the country, this is becoming the exception and not the rule. For the most part, extensive efforts are underway to provide every child not only with a "free and appropriate" education, but a good education as well. Schools everywhere have, and continue to, change the way in which education is delivered to the nation's special education students. Policymakers must use the levers at their disposal to sustain the momentum and secure the advances that many have fought for since the inception of special education.

a new vision for Special Education Accountability

by Martha L. Thurlow and Jane L. Krentz

Accountability has long been considered a hallmark of special education services. But the view of accountability for special education is changing—driven, in part, by the larger educational context of accountability for results. With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 (IDEA '97), states and districts became accountable for publicly reporting on the educational results of students with disabilities, while not forgetting the need to maintain an individualized focus on educational goals, curriculum, and progress of the student.[1]

The philosophy underlying IDEA '97—that all children can learn—and the focus on accountability in other federal education laws, such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), indicate public consensus that the education system needs to be accountable for the learning of all children. These philosophies and beliefs have created new opportunities for students who are receiving special education services. At the same time, they have created challenges for schools, districts, and states faced with having to count students who in the past were not in their accountability systems.

Today's accountability systems are high stakes—not just for students, but also for the education system itself. States and districts have imposed their own accountability systems (whereby schools are ranked, or teachers receive rewards—just two examples of the consequences being implemented). In addition, the federal ESEA has joined the picture by stipulating that in order to receive Title I funds, states must develop accountability systems that measure adequate yearly progress (AYP) and identify those schools not making adequate progress.[2]

All but two states have statewide assessments in place, many with more than one assessment.[3] Approximately half the states now use, or will soon use, tests in making decisions about student promotion and high school graduation.[4] As of the fall of 2000, there were 38 states with system accountability through which educators, administrators, schools, or districts are held responsible and consequences are assigned to them for various student performance indicators.[5]

Within system accountability there are, of course, different levels of consequences or stakes attached to test results and other performance indicators. At the "low-stakes" end is simply publishing test scores. While it might be considered "positive feedback" to be in a school that performed well on test scores, or conversely, might prove an embarrassment for schools or districts that performed poorly, these consequences are relatively minor. In contrast, if teachers are assigned to "less prestigious" schools or receive cash bonuses based on student performance, the stakes are considerably higher. Similarly, if principals receive increased school funds or lose their jobs based on how students in the school perform, the stakes are very high.

It is important to focus on all types of public accountability for system results because it has the greatest potential to change the public's view of the schools. It also has significant potential to change the school's impact on individual students, particularly those with disabilities.

Why Should There Be a New Accountability for Students with Disabilities?

In the early 1990s, research by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and by investigators of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that students with disabilities were being systematically excluded from assessment systems, and as a result, from the accountability measures based, in part, on student achievement.[6] This exclusion had several negative effects. For example, those students who were not included in various components of the accountability system received less attention when the pressure was on to get the best score possible for a school or district. The saying "we treasure what we measure" seemed to extend to "we treasure who we measure." Indeed, when discussions about the participation of students with disabilities in assessment systems took place, conversations often reverted back to concerns that reflected low

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expectations for what students with disabilities were able to do, and to a view that this group of students really could not be taught successfully.

Another negative effect of the systematic exclusion of students with disabilities from accountability systems was increased rates of referral to special education services. Both states and districts have now documented this tendency for educators to not want to count students perceived to perform poorly in school.[7] Yet these are the very students for whom schools need to be held accountable.

Concerns also arise about the heterogeneous nature of students receiving special education services. How can such a diverse group of students be included in meaningful ways in either assessments or accountability systems? These questions are changing as the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA is implemented. States are finding that students with significant disabilities can be included in an alternate assessment system, and that the results from the alternate assessment can be incorporated into the accountability system.[8]

Why Isn't the Old Way Good Enough?

Accountability based on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) recognizes the importance of treating students with disabilities as individuals, defining the goals toward which the student is working, and determining whether the progress made is adequate. All this is good. Unfortunately, too often student goals have been framed outside the general curriculum, with the result being that students are never exposed to the standards toward which all students need to be making progress. A panel formed by the National Research Council to address the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform concluded that if a student with disabilities is to gain the benefits from standards-based reform, the education system itself must be held publicly accountable for every student's performance.[9]

Public accountability is the key element that is missing from the old view of special education accountability. Accountability previously was a very private matter. It focused on the process of the IEP team—not on whether the student's goals were appropriate, or on whether the student ever achieved those goals.

How Are We Doing in Including Students with Disabilities in Accountability Systems?

Several analyses from before and after the enactment of IDEA '97 indicated that states have only recently started to include students with disabilities in their assessments and that many states are not yet reporting the results even though they are required to do so by federal law.[10] Staff at NCEO examined the extent to which students with disabilities are included in accountability indicators in those states in which there are high stakes for systems.[11] We conducted a search of states' education websites and direct links to their websites. We examined the indicators on which states collect information (e.g., student indicators, staff indicators, program indicators, use of resources indicators), as well as the consequences provided by the states (e.g., rewards, assistance, sanctions).

It became very evident during our verification process that the information we sought was a moving target. It changed rapidly due to on-going legislative processes, subsequent rule-making procedures that follow legislative sessions (in order to implement the legislation just passed), and states' actions taken in response to federal legislation. Not only was it difficult to determine on the state websites exactly which indicators factored into overall accountability systems, but it was also difficult to find evidence that students with disabilities were included in accountability systems. Although students with disabilities may have their scores reported, the scores often are not counted in the accountability system. According to the web-based analysis, only seven states seem to include all students with disabilities in their accountability systems. More commonly, a defined subset of students with disabilities is excluded (e.g., those who use "non-standard" accommodations, have a parental request to not participate, have extended absenteeism, and in some states, all those on IEPs); many states simply did not specify whether students with disabilities were included.

Of the seven states that seem to include all students with disabilities, there was no confirming information on the website to validate or contradict that information for Alaska. However, of the remaining six states, five had documented evidence on their websites that indicated all students with disabilities do count: Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, New Mexico, and New York. The seventh state, Louisiana, has a system of inclusion of all students with disabilities currently in place for grades K-8 and indicated that grades 9-12 are scheduled to be added in 2001.

The following details steps that these states have taken to include students with disabilities into their accountability systems:

- The Illinois website clearly states that if a student (IEP or non-IEP) takes a state assessment and passes the "attemptedness" criterion, that student's score will be included in the school, sub-district, district, and state averages and data computations. Beginning in 1999, the option of allowing the student to take the state assessment and excluding the score from the state, district, or school aggregations (known as "bubbling out") would not be available. For those students who receive special education services in a facility that is not the student's home school or school of origin, the student's scores would be included in the aggregations of the "home school" and the "home district." The annual school report card must contain at least the following two scores: the scores for all students (IEP and non-IEP) and disaggregated scores for IEP students only.
- In Kentucky, for each school and district, the average performance of all students is assessed in each content area. The content-area averages are combined with non-academic factors to determine a school or district average performance level. Scores from alternate portfolios are included in the academic indices. This enables data from an alternate portfolio completed by an eligible student to contribute the same weight to the academic component of the accountability index as would the data for a student participating in the regular components of the assessment program at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. Students with limited English proficiency (LEP) are included after they have been in an English-speaking school for at least two years.

All students, including those with disabilities, are expected to participate in Louisiana's testing program. Approximately 80 per-

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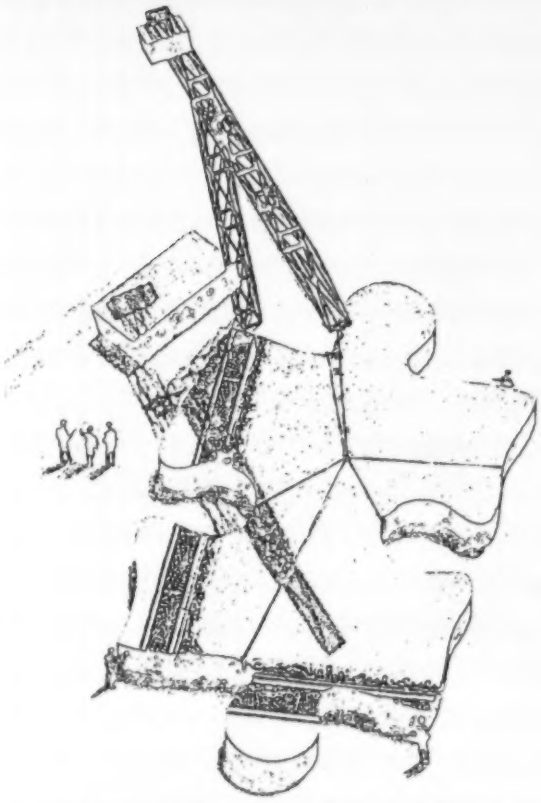

"The benefits of inclusive assessment and accountability systems are beginning to outweigh the challenges...."

cent of students with disabilities will take the LEAP-21 (Louisiana's criterion-referenced test) and the Iowa Tests (with accommodations, if required by their IEPs). The remaining 20 percent or so are those with very significant disabilities, and they take an alternate assessment as required by their IEPs. The scores of every student who is eligible to take the LEAP-21 and the Iowa Tests will be included in the calculation of the school performance score. Each school will receive two school performance scores as follows: a score including only regular education students (including gifted, talented, and speech-impaired only, and 504 students*) and a score including regular education and students with disabilities.

In Missouri, students with disabilities who participate in the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) subject-area assessments without accommodations receive valid norm-referenced scores for the Terra Nova tests for each subject area. They also receive standards-referenced scores for their overall performance in relation to Missouri's Show Me Standards. Students with disabilities who receive accommodations will not have valid norm-referenced scores, but will receive valid information about their performance in relation to the Show Me Standards. Their standards-referenced scores will be aggregated with those of other students to describe classroom, building, and district performance. Students with disabilities will have their scores aggregated and reported in their district of residence, even if they receive services in another district.

New Mexico's website simply stated that scores of special education students are reported to the state separately and as a part of the aggregate report, except when reporting the scores of less than ten special education students. Students enrolled in home schools or private schools who are receiving special education services at public expense are included, but students who attend Bureau of Indian Affairs schools are not counted by the local education agency.

Finally, in New York, the performance of all students, including students with disabilities, is included in the calculations used to determine whether a district is required to develop a local assistance plan for a school, to identify schools not meeting state standards, and to determine if schools are making adequate yearly progress. On the school report card, the performance of all students tested (including students with disabilities) are aggregated. On the 5th grade writing test, the performance of students in general education are reported separately from that of students receiving supplemental services. For all measures, except attendance, drop-out, and suspension rates, the performance of students with disabilities are displayed separately as well as aggregated. For each assessment given, the school reports the number of students tested, the number of students scoring at each performance level, and the number of students who were IEP-exempted.

What Happens When Students with Disabilities are Included?

The evidence of the definite positive effects of including students with disabilities in accountability systems is beginning to accumulate. While much of the information is still anecdotal, there are also data indicating that with inclusion in the accountability system, students who formerly were ignored are now being given critical instructional attention.

Inclusion of all students in standards-based assessments increases expectations for these students. Data from Kentucky show a narrowing of the gap between the performance of students with disabilities and other students, particularly in the elementary grades, after

*Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects the civil and constitutional rights of people with disabilities; as it pertains to schools, Section 504 plans provide accommodations, if needed, for students who have disabilities that do not directly impair learning.

inclusion.[12] In New York, including all students in the Regents exams has generated considerable controversy. Concerns were raised about the fairness of high-stakes tests for students who may not have had the same opportunity to learn. The April 2001 report to the Regents by the New York State Education Department had encouraging results indicating that more students with disabilities *passed* the exams in 2000 than *took* the tests in 1998, while the drop-out rates have decreased slightly during this time period.[13] [See Larry Gloeckler's article "The Door to Opportunity: Let's Open It for Everyone" on page 20 in this edition of the *Standard* for an in-depth look at New York's experience with this issue.]

While there is evidence of many positive effects of testing, there has also been very vocal opposition to and concern about unintended consequences. Increases in the number of students who drop out of school, more students taking the GED, more students being retained, costly litigation, and poorly developed or improperly implemented tests are all related issues of concern that all should be documented with data and that policymakers must address as they adopt or modify testing requirements.

Assessment systems should change as negative or unintended consequences are identified—not to modify or lower the standards, but to make the assessment more appropriate for all students. An example of this evolution has occurred in Oregon, which implemented a high-stakes assessment system in 1999 under which sophomores were required to pass a series of tests to achieve a "Certificate of Initial Mastery." Schools and districts made a number of high-stakes decisions based on these tests, including the possibility of graduation and eligibility for scholarships. The list of allowable accommodations was relatively limited, and many students with learning disabilities were denied accommodations for testing that were included in the students' IEPs or 504 plans. A lawsuit involving Advocates for Special Kids (ASK) versus the State of Oregon resulted in a settlement agreement to provide more accommodations options, expand alternate assessments, and broaden the opportunity for appeal.[14]

NCEO has been surveying state directors of special education about efforts to include students with disabilities in education reform for the past ten years. The most recent report includes the following findings:[15]

- More states listed positive consequences of inclusive standards, assessments, and accountability than listed negative consequences.
- More than half of the states reported increases in participation rates.
- In two-thirds of the states, directors reported stable or increased performance levels of students with disabilities on state tests.
- Nearly 60 percent of states keep track of accommodations, and half of these reported increased use of accommodations.
- Most states are using a portfolio or body of evidence approach for their alternate assessments.
- While students may use accommodations whether or not they are approved, nearly half of the states do not report the scores of students who use non-approved accommodations.
- Twenty-five states include alternate assessment participants in all components of their accountability systems.

The benefits of inclusive assessment and accountability systems are beginning to outweigh the challenges, and many states are taking positive approaches as they face the challenges ahead. It is important for policymakers to recognize and track both the intended and unintended consequences as the nation moves forward with assessment and accountability systems.

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Including All Students with Disabilities in Statewide Assessment Programs:

CHALLENGE & CHANGE OF IDEA '97

by Edward Roeber and Ken Warlick

A major change is occurring across the nation in state and local assessment programs: Additional students with disabilities—previously excluded from such programs—are now taking part in them. Some of these students participate in the general education assessment programs, using accommodations previously not available to them. Others participate through alternate means of assessment.

This change is due to revisions of federal laws adopted during the 1990s. States and local school systems are working to bring their assessment programs into compliance with these laws and, more importantly, they want to be sure the adjustments they are making will bring about constructive differences in the ways students with disabilities are educated. What has caused such change and how has it impacted students and schools thus far?

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

In 1994, amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) required that all students with disabilities must participate in state assessment programs, and that such programs must be used to evaluate the effectiveness of Title I compensatory education programs. Through participation in assessment programs aligned to state content standards, the 1994 reforms made it possible to determine the adequate yearly progress of schools based on the performance of every student. Participation of *all* students with disabilities in state assessment programs was first included in this landmark legislation.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA '97) contains additional requirements regarding the participation of students with disabilities in state and local assessment programs. IDEA '97 requires

that as of July 1, 2000, all students with disabilities—even those with the most complex disabilities, those who have previously not participated in statewide or district-wide assessments—must participate in general state or local assessment programs. Participation can occur in one of three ways: with or without accommodations in the general, on-demand assessment or through an alternate assessment.

IDEA '97 also requires that reporting the performance of students with disabilities must be of the same nature and frequency as that of the general education assessment reports for other students. In addition, IDEA '97 requires that the results of all students with disabilities must be aggregated with the results of students with no disabilities, and that the results of all students with disabilities must be disaggregated from the performance of all students.

Title I requires states to explain how scores from the alternate assessment will be included in the state's assessment and accountability systems. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires reporting on the participation rates and performance of students with disabilities in the alternate assessment. Both Title I and OSEP require that scores from the alternate assessment must be "visible" in reports, and OSEP encourages states to aggregate scores from the alternate assessment with scores for all students where feasible.

UNDERLYING REASONS FOR CHANGE

The advocates who brought about these legislative changes are convinced that when students do not participate in the same large-scale assessment programs as almost all other students, their education suffers. For example, expectations may be lowered for students with disabilities by providing instruction only in low-level functional skills. This is a particular problem when such students are educated only in segregated classes, using a separate curriculum that may not provide access to the state's general education content standards. They may not be sufficiently challenged, which may result in low or no achievement on their part. If the students don't count, what is the incentive to teach them?

The law requires that *all* students, even those with the most complex disabilities, need to participate in large-scale state and district assessment programs, so that they do count and so that they are educated to the maximum extent possible.

TYPES OF LARGE-SCALE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

Most statewide assessments are either *standards-based* or *norm-referenced*. Standards-based assessment programs directly measure a student's performance relative to the content standards of the state, often using both multiple-choice and constructed-response items. They answer the question—what proportion of the standards measured has the student accomplished?—with results reported in such terms as "advanced," "proficient," "partially proficient," or "novice" to suggest different levels of accomplishment. These programs strive to encourage all students to achieve all standards at high levels (e.g., proficient or advanced).

In norm-referenced testing programs, the performance of students is reported relative to a norm group (a statistically representative group of students used as a comparison sample). Results are reported relative to this norm group, either in percentile ranks, normal-curve equivalents, grade levels, or other comparative scores. These tests are typically purchased from test publishers and used either off-the-shelf (as is) or customized for statewide use with the addition of test items designed to more completely measure state standards.

HISTORY OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN STATE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

In the past, students with disabilities were often exempted from state and local district assessment programs, especially in states and districts using norm-referenced tests. Since the participation rate of students with disabilities in the norming samples is often low, the on-going participation rate of students with disabilities on such tests is kept equally low, so that the district or school results can be validly compared with those of the norm group. Common belief was that participation would not be educationally helpful to such students, and that participation could only occur through accommodations that would give these students an unfair advantage.

However, if students are not included in general assessment programs administered at the state and local levels, they are also not included in instructional improvement activities at the school or student levels. The belief that exclusion or exemption equals fewer and/or lower-level educational opportunities for these students grew stronger over the years.

IDEA '97 contributed several improvements. First, with the guidance of OSEP, it stressed that the local Individual Education Plan (IEP) team—not the state—should determine the accommodations needed for the student to participate in the general state assessment program. No longer could states prohibit some accommodations, as long as the student used these accommodations in everyday instruction.

Second, IDEA '97 requires that all students with disabilities participate in the state and district assessments; the issue is no longer *whether*, but *how*. The question now is, will participation be with or without accommodations, or through an alternate assessment?

Third, the law requires that all students with disabilities, even the students with the most complex disabilities, be given access to the state's and district's general education standards and instruction.

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HELPING STUDENTS WITH COMPLEX DISABILITIES ACCESS STATES' GENERAL CONTENT STANDARDS

The most important aspect of IDEA '97 is not assessment-related, although it appears so on the surface. Underlying the assessment requirements is a more fundamental requirement that students with complex disabilities must be given access to the state's and district's general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible. The challenge of IDEA '97 is how to provide such access, working with a group of students who have often received low-level, functional instruction with little resemblance to the instruction provided to all other students. IDEA '97 therefore requires that schools help students who have not been taught skills related to the academic content standards that form the basis of instruction for other students. How should special educators do this, since few have had the opportunity to learn these skills in college?

One way states are meeting this challenge is to expand or extend the general education academic standards to provide a series of access points at increasing levels of complexity and fidelity to the standards. For example, a standard that would call for a student to write an essay might be expanded to include the following steps in contextual situations: "hold a pen or pencil; make marks with the writing utensil; form letters (trace or free-form); write words; write sentences and paragraphs; write an essay." These and other entry points would permit all students to gain access to the standard and to work on acquiring that and subsequent skills. While some students may not get to the end point of this standard, at least some with complex disabilities may do so.

IDEA '97 requires improved teaching and learning for all students with disabilities by raising expectations, by ensuring access to the general curriculum, and by using performance data to improve programs. We should not hold low or negative expectations for these (or any other) students, but instead hold out the hope or the possibility that every student can learn, and that learning can be directed to learning important academic as well as functional skills. The alternate assessment of students can be based on these expanded standards.

TYPES OF ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

Because of the diversity among the few students who require an alternate assessment, the methods by which they are assessed must also differ. Some common ways in which students are alternately assessed follow.

Local District Determination

These states defer requirements to local school systems. With no uniform statewide system in effect, local school systems use the advice and assistance provided by the state to develop an alternate assessment strategy. The advantage of this approach is that it minimizes the use of state resources and intrusion. However, the state must then figure out how to produce comparable data from a system marked by diversity in assessment approaches.

IEP Review

Some states defer the requirement for participation in state assessment programs to local districts by directing that such participation requirements be met through a review of the student's IEP progress. It is theoretically possible to set IEP goals and objectives based on state content standards (so that a review of IEP progress would provide a status report on accomplishing state standards). However, the lack of external validation of the progress determination by persons not involved in the IEP may doom this method as a viable means of meeting the assessment requirements of IDEA '97.

Checklists

This method relies on teachers to recollect whether students were able to carry out certain activities. The advantage of this technique is the rapid assembly of information, but due to the nature of recollection, that information may not be highly reliable. Scores reported usually comprise the number of skills that the student was able to perform successfully. This method permits student scores to be added up and reported easily and inexpensively. However, since the checklist is a record of past achievements, it has little power to show teachers what students might be able to learn in the future. It also does little to give the students access to the general education curriculum at the current time. It may be difficult to compile a comprehensive checklist that is linked to the standards and addresses the diversity of learning within the population of students participating in the alternate assessment.

Unstructured and Structured Observation

This assessment method encourages teachers, after training, to observe students' abilities to perform specific activities. Observation in unstructured situations is on-going observation of a student in everyday classroom settings and elsewhere, without any overt attempt to increase the likelihood that the activity will occur. In a structured situation, the teacher sets up a situation in which the activity being observed is more likely to occur—thus making the observation of it more likely. Teachers can record their observations on data sheets, which may be numerical or graphical representations of the performances of students. Scores reported usually consist of the number of skills that the student is able to successfully perform. This method merely permits the scores of students to be added up and reported.

While observation does have the advantage that it does not rely on recollection, it does require a teacher's ability to spot the desired behavior within an ongoing instructional situation and to accurately record this observation. The disadvantage of this method is that the teacher may need training in order to observe a skill reliably.

Performance Assessments

These are direct measures of a skill, usually in a one-on-one assessment situation. Due to the nature of students' disabilities, these are rarely paper-based assessments. They are more likely to involve the teacher and the student working through an assessment that utilizes manipulatives, with the teacher observing whether the student is able to perform the assigned task.

The advantage of using a performance assessment is the ability to assess a student flexibly, starting with very simple skills and working toward more complex ones, and to observe the actual performance of the student directly. The disadvantage of this assessment is that it is time-intensive, since each student needs to be assessed individually. Time constraints may limit the assessment to only a handful of skills. Scores are typically assigned to each performance assessment, although in more complex per-

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formance assessments an underlying scale of task complexity may form the basis for reporting.

Samples of Student Work

In the course of learning, students may produce worksheets, writing samples, artwork, or other "artifacts" that demonstrate the skills being assessed. These can be included in the assessment. For example, a teacher might grade a student's worksheets or include them in a broader assessment to reinforce observations about the student's performance.

While the advantage of this assessment method is the ability to utilize existing work in the assessment process, not all students will be able to produce samples of work.

Portfolios

This assessment method uses a collection of student work, performance assessments, observations, and other data about students to judge their achievement. For example, the teacher may be required to submit two entries in mathematics, each measuring a different set of standards. Each entry may comprise three to five pieces of evidence, which might be two worksheets, a data-monitoring sheet summarizing the observations of teachers, and an individual assessment given to the student. Various pieces collected to demonstrate a student's performance on each standard or group of standards are usually judged together, although the entire content area or entire portfolio may be assigned a single score.

The primary advantage of the portfolio is its flexibility, since the teacher can decide the nature and extent of the documentation to be submitted for each entry and the skills assessed may differ from one student to another. Effective portfolios, which also require that educators help students access the general education standards, can be an effective boost to academic access. However, portfolios are time-intensive and, to be effective, require on-going documentation of student performance. In addition, some educators find it difficult to determine instructional access for some of the students with the most complex disabilities.

STATUS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS

States across the country are at various stages of determining how students with complex disabilities will participate in large-scale assessment programs. Some states such as Kentucky have had alternate assessment systems in place for several years and have refined those systems over time. Other states have just completed the first year of data collection and will refine their alternate assessment systems after scoring and reporting these initial results and before beginning the second year of implementation. Still others are just beginning the process of compliance with ESEA and IDEA. Many of them have received letters from the U.S. Department of Education indicating their lack of compliance with these laws, seeking more information about plans to comply, and in some cases, providing a timetable for doing so.

At this point, states are being monitored to determine whether all students with disabilities are participating in one way or another. Key issues include whether the state has created statewide content standards and has an assessment program aligned to these standards, and whether all students—with or without disabilities—are participating in the state assessment program. The nature of the alternate assessment program has not become an issue so far. It is not clear what types of assessment will or will not be permitted in the long run because the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has yet to monitor states on their compliance with the alternate assessment requirements of IDEA '97. Therefore, states are working to comply with a law about which they may be uncertain.

STUDENT SCORES ON ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS

The types of scores derived depend on the nature of the alternate assessment. Those employing checklists will yield multiple items, scored 1-4 or 1-5, and an overall total score (which may be the number of items checked with 1s, 2s, 3s, and 4s) or some other summary of overall student performance. The same may be true for observational assessments, and even performance events—particularly when they consist of a number of small steps along a scale of performance, each scored on a 1-4 or a 1-5 scale.

Portfolios, and some performance tasks, are scored using rubrics, and the student score is derived from the nature and number of rubrics employed. In some assessments, students' performances or portfolios are scored *holistically*, such as across multiple content areas or the entire portfolio using an overall performance rubric.

In other cases, students' performances are scored *analytically*, according to multiple dimensions. The dimensions used to score student work can focus on *student performance*, *program opportunities* provided to students, or a combination of both. They can include a qualitative judgement about the overall level of performance of the student, as well as how closely the student's performance matched the content standard(s), as written. The program dimensions could include whether students were provided instruction in multiple settings; whether they were provided opportunities to plan, monitor, and evaluate their work; whether there was evidence that they worked with non-disabled peers; and whether they were provided with appropriate human and technological supports.

Other program opportunities can also be expressed as student performance dimensions, including whether the student can demonstrate the skill in multiple settings; plan, monitor, and evaluate his or her work; work with non-disabled peers; and work independently (using appropriate human and technological supports). Depending on the nature of scoring dimensions used, scores may be a simple sum across dimensions, multiplied with one another, or weighted in some fashion.

REPORTING THE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

While each state reports its alternate assessment information in somewhat different ways (because they report their regular assessment program information differently), there are some similarities among these reporting schema. Depending on the purposes and

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methods of the regular assessment program, alternate assessment program reports may focus on program information, individual student information, or both.

Program data is reported in order to hold the school in which a student is being taught, or the school that referred the student to that school, *accountable* for the student's performance. Programs might be held accountable for whether needed human or technological supports were made available, the inclusiveness of a student's program, the number of settings in which a student's accomplishments were evidenced, and the extent to which students are given opportunities to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own performances.

Individual student information is reported in order to describe the current level of the student's performance. The information may focus on the qualities of the student's performance on the assessment, as well as how closely the student's performance matched the content standard(s), as written; the breadth or number of standards achieved; and the supports needed to achieve at the level observed.

In almost every case, both student and program data is not used for high-stakes student accountability (to promote or graduate a student nor to retain them). It is used instead to hold the school accountable for the learning opportunities afforded students, whether evidenced directly through student performance measures or more indirectly, through program opportunity measures.

IDEA '97 sets some parameters on reporting. First, the law requires that the performance of all students with disabilities must be aggregated with the performances of students without disabilities, so that 100 percent of the students are counted (not simply "accounted for" by reporting them in a "no report" category). Second, IDEA '97 requires that the performance of students with disabilities must be disaggregated from the performance of other students. In this case, the performances of the students with disabilities who take the tests with or without accommodations are to be added to the performances of students without disabilities and reported together.

The key question is how to accomplish these combined and disaggregated performances, when some students take a test and others participate in an alternate assessment composed of a portfolio, performance events, or a checklist. A total report of results by content area is needed.

Some states using portfolios accomplish this is by summing the performances of students to arrive at a total score. Once a series of total scores is determined, the manner in which these scores are labeled is a determiner of how they will be reported along with scores from the regular assessment program.

THIS FALL AND BEYOND

As students return to schools in the fall, states that have initiated alternate assessments in their states will be carrying out several activities. First, states will be making adjustments to their alternate assessment programs to capitalize on the experiences of the initial year of statewide implementation. Assessment protocols, manuals, and other materials will be revised to sharpen the language and clarify the assessment procedures. Scoring rubrics will be refined. Exemplary student work will be added to manuals to give educators an even better idea of what "good" looks like. Training and materials will be polished as well.

Significant changes in the reporting of state assessment and local assessment results are scheduled for this fall. As states struggle with the issues of reporting, and as they determine how reporting should be done this year and beyond, reports will undoubtedly continue to change as well.

More broadly, the participation of students with complex disabilities in state and district assessment programs will have additional ramifications for the field of special education, including greater pre-service and in-service attention to standards-based IEPs and instruction for these students. Many teachers of students with complex disabilities have not been exposed to statewide general education standards, since such students have never been presumed to need such instruction. However, the work of implementing alternate assessment programs in several states has shown such assumptions to be false. Still the issue remains, how will we equip teachers of the significantly disabled so they are able to adapt lessons that introduce students to standards-based, age-appropriate instruction? What will those teachers need to continue the challenge of educating their students to the maximum extent possible in the time they have to do so?

Teachers of students with complex disabilities will need to learn new skills in assessment, as well as in instruction. As they are introduced to new methods of assessing students and documenting their achievement, they will need to learn more about assessment and how to conduct such assessments in a reliable and valid manner.

As students with complex disabilities show us that they are capable of acquiring general education skills, the ways in which we educate these students will continue to change. The inclusion of *all* students with disabilities in state and district assessment programs has already begun to make profound changes in how we educate these students and what they have shown us they have learned. Such changes have only just begun. As changes in the way we assess these students bring about changes in how we educate them, the profound impact on these students will continue. The best is yet to come.

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beginning journeys

A New Vision for Early Childhood Education

INTRODUCTION

Infancy and early childhood are important times in any child's life. It is a time when children move beyond relationships with their families and develop a curiosity about the world of other adults and children. For children with disabilities, the early years are critical for a number of reasons. First, the earlier a child is identified as having a developmental delay or disability, the greater the likelihood the child will benefit from intervention strategies designed to compensate for the child's needs. Second, families of children with disabilities benefit from the support given to them through the intervention process. Last, schools and communities benefit from a decrease in costs because more children arrive ready for school as a result of children with disabilities receiving early intervention supports and services.

As a field, early intervention has been defined as the provision of educational or therapeutic services to children under the age of 8.[1] Legislatively, *early intervention* is used to describe the years birth to 3, while the term *early childhood special education* or *preschool special education* has been used to describe the period of preschool years (ages 3-5). This article provides an overview of early childhood intervention practice, policy, and research as a foundation for the development of a new vision of early childhood programs that support all children.

BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, there have been many changes and challenges facing families, service providers, agencies, and systems that serve young children. For example, the most apparent change in U.S. society over the past 15 years has been in our demographic profile. One of the most notable is the changing definition of family. The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines a family as two or more people living together who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption, one of whom is the householder. In 1997, 76 percent of the 70.2 million American families were married couples. However, since 1970, the number of female-headed families has increased by 133 percent (from 5.5 million to 12.8 million). By 1997, 28 percent of families with children under 18 were headed by one parent (23 percent by mother only; 5 percent by father only).

by Mary Beth Bruder

Compounding the changing definition of family are the documented effects of poverty on children's development and family functioning.[2] Recent analyses indicate that 43 percent of all young children under age 6 are growing up in poverty, extreme poverty, or near poverty.[3] There have been many studies documenting negative outcomes for children who grow up in poverty.[4] These outcomes include poor physical health, delayed development and disability, low school achievement, emotional or behavioral problems, increased hunger and malnutrition, increased child abuse and neglect, and increased foster care placements for children.[5] These data suggest a growing number of children vulnerable for developmental delays and in need of optimal learning opportunities.

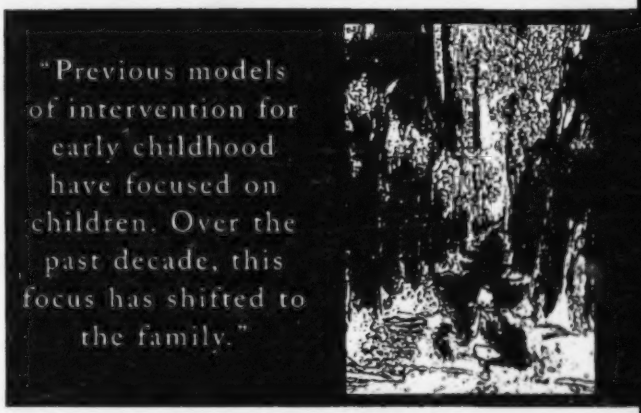
Another change in our demographics is reflected in the cultural diversity of the U.S. population. During the 1980s, there was a 63 percent increase in the immigrant population from the previous decade.[6] As a result, by 1990 a quarter of the U.S. population was composed of persons of Hispanic origin or persons of color.[7] Thus, the children and families served by early intervention represented a culturally and linguistically diverse population that continues to grow. It has been projected that by the year 2030, 41 percent of the nation's children under the age of 18 will be Hispanic and other children of traditional minority groups.[8]

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

The changes in society have necessitated a number of changes in service delivery models for young children with disabilities. First, and most importantly, has been a redefinition of the target of early care and education. Previous models of intervention for early childhood have focused on children. Over the past decade, this focus has shifted to the family.[9] The caregiving family must be seen as the constant in the child's life and the primary unit for service delivery.[10] A family-centered approach to early childhood intervention is based on at least three assumptions: (1) that families and children represent an interdependent family system; (2) that intervention is more powerful when families are involved and supported; and (3) that family members should have a voice in all aspects of service provision.[11]

A second important change in service delivery is the ongoing emphasis on collaborative service models.[12] Young children with disabilities often require the combined expertise of numerous professions and agencies providing specialized services.[13] For example, personnel having medical expertise, therapeutic expertise, developmental expertise, and social service expertise are frequently needed to assist a child and family. Each of these service providers may represent a different professional discipline and different philosophical model of service delivery.[14]

In order to assure a collaborative service delivery model among those providing services, it has been suggested that intervention services be delivered through a team approach. A group of people become a team when their purpose and function are derived from a common philosophy with shared goals.[15] Although three team models (multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary) are evident in service delivery for young children with disabilities, the transdisciplinary model is recommended. The transdisciplinary approach integrates a child's developmental needs across the major developmental domains, and the child's program is primarily implemented by a single person or a few persons with on-going assistance (both direct and consultative) provided by team members from the various disciplines.[16]


"Previous models of intervention for early childhood have focused on children. Over the past decade, this focus has shifted to the family."

A third service delivery change has been the location in which intervention occurs. A variety of factors influence the decision about the optimum service setting for a young child with disabilities. These include the location of the family's home (e.g., urban versus rural), the needs of the child, the transportation resources of the family and program, and the preference of the family. Early childhood intervention can be provided in a hospital setting, a child care setting (a center, family day care home, or baby-sitter's house), a preschool setting, the home, or elsewhere in the community.

Children with disabilities benefit from participating in group settings with children without disabilities; in fact, this practice has been cited as a quality indicator of early intervention services and as such it has been adopted by professional organizations and mandated by law.[17] It is important to note that not all services have to be provided at the same location; the settings may change over time as the needs of the family and child change. Clearly, there is no standard setting for early intervention. No matter where the intervention services occur, the intervention techniques and services (including assistive technology) must be transferable within all of the settings in which the child and family participate, most notably those settings identified as natural environments.

POLICY STATUS

A number of policy and legislative programs have been designed to support the needs of young children with disabilities and their families. These Congressional directives are varied and include specific statutory requirements in new or reauthorized disability-specific legislation or statutory provisions that address the needs of a broader population of children (such as Early Head Start, Head Start, or state children's health insurance programs). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has the most far-reaching effects for young children with disabilities. It is described in part below.

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Part C of IDEA—Infants and Toddlers

The regulations that govern services to infants and toddlers fall under Part C of IDEA. This act allows states flexibility in meeting the needs of their infants and toddlers with disabilities in a number of areas. These include eligibility criteria for services (including whether or not to serve at-risk children) and the lead agency for services. As a result, this program differs state by state. A cornerstone of this program is the development of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) that is developed by the early intervention team and child's family. The IFSP is one mechanism to ensure that state and local programs meet the purposes of the Part C program, one of which is to enhance the capacity of families to meet the special needs of their infants and toddlers.

Another provision of Part C services is the requirement for services to be delivered in natural environments. Natural environments include the home or places in which typically developing children participate. This requirement provides a number of opportunities for families and children to receive intervention in everyday routines, activities, and experiences. In fact, this promotes the inclusion of children with disabilities in groups with children without disabilities, a practice that has been supported for over 25 years.

Part B of IDEA—Preschool

Children with disabilities, age 3-5, fall under the Part B section of IDEA. As such, their special education needs are the responsibility of the public schools. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is the process that is used to document a child's educational and related service needs. The 1997 amendments to IDEA placed a renewed emphasis on supporting children who receive special education in regular age-appropriate classrooms where they have access to the general curriculum. This challenge should be guiding the revamping of preschool special education to allow greater collaboration with early childhood programs such as Head Start, state-funded prekindergarten programs, kindergarten programs, and other early care and education opportunities available to preschool children without disabilities.

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future directions in research include two areas that are highlighted below: enhancing children's learning opportunities and service integration.

Enhancing Children's Learning Opportunities

Children's lives are made up of many different kinds of learning experiences and opportunities that have the potential of enhancing their development. The ecological model of learning and development suggests that behavior exists and is best understood contextually. Infants and toddlers participate in a number of contexts such as the family, the community, and the program. The family includes a mix of people and places that support a variety of child learning opportunities. These opportunities include eating during meal times, splashing water during bath time, listening to stories, and learning greeting skills at family get-togethers. The same kind of opportunities occur in the community and include the people and places experienced on neighborhood walks, at a children's park, at children's festivals, at nature centers, and so forth.

Families almost universally consider different activity settings as the primary contexts for defining important aspects of family life.[19] Activity settings include both the psychological (including cultural) and physical components of the interactions, tasks, and routines of a family, such as family meal times, the reading of books to children at bedtime, participation in storytelling by elders, family rituals and traditions, and community festivals and celebrations.[19] These activity settings are similar in that they all provide child-development opportunities and experiences, but they may differ in their purposes, functions, demands, and expectations. Additionally, it is now known that the particular activity settings that define family life are ones to which families ascribe special meaning. Again, these settings include, but are not limited to, experiences that parents desire for their children in order to promote development, skills, and values consistent with their cultural beliefs.[20]

The Increasing Children's Learning Opportunities through Families and Communities Research Institute has been identifying and studying naturally occurring teaming opportunities.[21] Institute findings, thus far, indicate that activity settings involve the active participation of a child in learning, and that they strengthen existing capabilities as well as promote and enhance new competencies.[22] Activity settings occur in different locations, within the home and the community and in places in which typical children participate. Natural learning environments can then be described in terms of activity settings, as such settings provide the context for everyday, typically occurring learning opportunities.

Surveys and case studies have documented the abundant source of activity settings in children's lives. Most children, regardless of their disability or severity of delay, experienced multiple kinds of learning opportunities regardless of where they lived. For example, findings indicated that young children experienced learning opportunities, on average, in about 15 different home locations and 23 different community locations. These locations, in turn, supported an average of 87 and 76 home and community activity settings or natural learning environments, respectively. These learning environments, in turn, resulted in an average of 113 and 106 learning opportunities in the child's home and community, respectively. Consequently, an individual child could be expected to experience some 200 or more learning opportunities in the context of his or her family and community life beyond those provided as part of a child's involvement in an early intervention or preschool program. A model of early childhood intervention that emanates from family-identified activity settings provides the foundation to enhance family capacity to occur and capitalizes on research findings about the importance of family attitudes and beliefs, family social support networks, and family-orchestrated learning experiences to child development and competence. An important family factor that can influence child learning and development is parents' awareness and use of the learning opportunities that occur within their activity settings.

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Service Integration

The unique needs of children and families eligible for early intervention have created many challenges to service providers. Both federal legislation (Part C of IDEA) and recommended practice suggest that services provided to young children with disabilities be family centered, comprehensive, community based, and coordinated.[23] At this time, state and local service agencies are struggling with the development of early intervention programs that encompass the above-mentioned characteristics, as well as meeting the unique and growing needs of infants and toddlers.[24] In designing such services, more variables must be addressed, especially coordination among all the service systems serving a family.

Unfortunately, the development of coordinated early intervention services remains a challenge for many states.[25] This is not surprising considering that the service delivery system is composed of independent agencies, institutions, and organizations, with each providing a specific service or function. As a result, each participating agency has its own orientation toward the service system. For example, hospitals and health professionals view early intervention service provision differently from community-oriented agencies and professionals.[26]

The development of interagency collaborative services for infants and toddlers with disabilities may be problematic because of the breadth and scope of the possible collaborations.[27] Service integration is a truly collaborative model of early intervention that involves all services and supports engaged in by a family, regardless of whether they are accessed as a function of the child's disability.[28] A definition of service integration was developed by Agranoff and Pattakos.[29] This definition defines four interrelated dimensions of service integration. They are: (1) service delivery (integration focused on clients, based on a holistic, comprehensive understanding of the multiple problems they face); (2) program linkages (integration focused on linkage of discrete services into a multifaceted delivery system); (3) policy management (integration carried out by governments to increase the coherence and responsibility of the human service system); and (4) organizational structure (integration involving the reorganization and creation of government structures).[30]

There are many benefits to integrated, collaborative service-delivery models, the most important being improved service delivery to the target population.[31] This occurs as a result of more efficient and effective use of services, providers, and funding streams across agencies.[32] These models also result in reduced service duplication.[33] In addition, collaborative efforts enable parents and service providers to efficiently locate and manage the services required by the family, such as child care and medical supports.[34] Lastly, collaboration models eliminate the need for formal transitions, as services are integrated comprehensively and longitudinally.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In providing early childhood services to young children with disabilities, it is clear that the future must focus on utilizing research to guide practice and policy. The enhancement of children's learning opportunities through truly integrated service models presents challenges that must be addressed if we are to build a future for all children. However, the intricacies inherent in service systems that are purposefully designed to meet these challenges demand a high level of commitment to a child and family's (and community's) well-being. In order to demonstrate this commitment, leadership or change agent skills must be exerted and shared by all involved in the area of early childhood intervention. It must be cultivated in personnel preparation programs and nourished by service delivery administrators. Only then will we optimize the probability of quality, comprehensive early childhood programs for all.

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Regents exam

The Door to Opportunity

let's open it for everyone

For the past two decades, as special education has become a larger and larger piece of the overall education pie, two themes have dominated discussions about it: cost and process.

Cost has been a dominant theme because of the dramatic increase in educational expenditures associated with special education over that twenty-year time frame. Within the discussions, examples of the extraordinary costs of unique children were often the centerpiece of the explanation as to why it is so expensive. The truth of the matter is that the cost has risen dramatically for two major reasons:

First, the number of children whose special education instructional and related services are charged to the special education ledger has grown dramatically. It has not been the expensive-to-educate "unique child" who has been the primary cause for escalating costs. Second, the process elements of special education are costly. Inherent in the law is an administrative structure—including due process, which is unique to special education and far more expensive per child, even before factoring in any costs associated with instruction and support services, than any administrative process in general education.

The other dominant theme has been the complicated nature of the special education process. Untold human and fiscal resources have been allotted to attempt to make sure the process established by law—referral, evaluation, placement, the Individual Education Plan (IEP), and due process arising over disputes about the process—is followed precisely. With federal and state monitoring systems aligned to check the process, school districts hired administrators to focus on compliance with that process, and a cottage industry of "lawyer/advocates" grew, either helping the parent challenge the process or helping the local district defend it. That, too, has become costly.

As the special education system developed, students were being educated in special education programs that were usually administered in the local district separately from the general education program. As a result of this separation, which was almost forced by the process and the subsequent oversight strategies put in place to monitor it, the quality of the education of these children went unmeasured—and because it wasn't measured, opportunities associated with educational performance and accountability went untapped.

Over the last decade, this has gradually led to new questions being raised in special education discussions: how much are students with disabilities learning, and are these students learning—and being taught—to their potential? This in turn has brought up the subject of including students with disabilities in large-scale, high-stakes testing programs. This article examines New York's efforts to include these students in its statewide assessments and shows how these policies, implemented properly, can open the door to new opportunities for the vast majority of our students with disabilities.

by Lawrence C. Gloeckler

Testing in New York

New York State has a long history of high-stakes assessment. The first Regents examinations (called that because they were administered under the policy aegis of the State Board of Regents—the education policy board for New York) were given in 1865 and unlike today were used as high-stakes examinations to *enter* high school rather than to *exit* it. In fact, the first statutory provision for the administering of Regents examinations was enacted in 1877.

One hundred years later, in 1977, the Board of Regents established Basic Competency Tests, which later evolved into Regents Competency Tests (RCTs). These were put into place to ensure that every student graduating from school in New York State met at least a basic standard of competency. Therefore, since 1977, all students graduating from a local district had to pass either the Regents examinations in order to receive a Regents diploma or the RCT in order to receive a local diploma.

Even though this requirement has been in place for students with disabilities for almost 25 years, the data about the success rate for those students were very spotty in the first 10 to15 years. Why? It simply wasn't an important policy issue. After all, the *process* of special education was the driving force for accountability, not the results. Yet each year, the percentage of the student enrollment receiving special education continued to grow, to the point where the student population receiving special education began to look very different from the children receiving services in 1975.

At the same time special education enrollment grew, so did the public dissatisfaction with the quality of educational performance in general. While policymakers, the business community, and postsecondary programs were lamenting the inadequacy of K-12 preparation for students exiting high school, they began to notice the virtual lack of performance information for students receiving special education services, even though more and more students were in that category. There would be an inevitable coming together of these two issues that would, and has, fundamentally changed the accountability landscape for programs serving students with disabilities.

In 1996, the New York Board of Regents made a milestone policy decision regarding the state's educational standards. The dissatisfaction with the value of a local diploma (one criteria for obtaining it was to pass Regents Competency Tests) had become commonplace among key stakeholders. Young adults who had that diploma were frequently viewed as unprepared for postsecondary education or to work effectively within the emerging business and industry environment. After several years of public debate, the Regents decided to phase out the RCTs and the local diploma and to require all students, in order to graduate with a diploma, to pass a series of Regents examinations. Shock waves rolled through the special education community.

Data-gathering and reporting performance for special education students had begun in earnest in New York in the early 1990s. The performance of students with disabilities on program evaluation tests, which were given in grades 3, 5, and 6, and on the Regents Competency Tests were tracked annually. By the time the 1996 decision was made to phase out the RCTs, about 60 percent of students with disabilities exiting high school were receiving a local diploma. However, another piece of data raised significant questions. Less than five percent of these students were receiving a Regents diploma, which required the passage of a series of Regents examinations. The percentage of children within the special education population receiving Regents diplomas had not changed for a number of years, even though the enrollments had been growing. Data showed that there were districts in the state that did not offer any students with disabilities the opportunity to take a Regents examination. This, of course, meant that in all likelihood none of the students with disabilities in those districts were being offered the opportunity to participate in Regents-level coursework, no matter what their intellectual ability.

It was crystal clear from the data that special education had become a program consisting of no more than competency-level coursework and competency-level examinations. Even students with disabilities who happened to be bright were very likely to be only in competency-level programs, simply because they were categorized as special education students. No wonder the Regents decision to phase out the competency tests—and therefore, competency-level coursework—was such a jolt to this segment of the educational system.

In developing policies to implement this decision, the Regents knew from the data that the students in special education had not been exposed to Regents-level coursework, so they had to devise a unique phase-in period for this new policy regarding this group of students. For the general education population, the Regents allowed the new Regents examinations to be phased in over a five-year period. They also allowed a passing score of 55 during this phase-in, with the passing score rising to 65 after the phase-in period. As a new examination was introduced, the RCT for that subject was phased out. However, for the special education population, which had less exposure than any group of students to Regents-level coursework, a "safety net" was established. During the phase-in period, school districts were required to provide access to Regents-level curriculum for students with disabilities and give them the opportunity to take Regents examinations. However, if they were unable to pass those examinations, they were allowed to take the RCTs in the corresponding areas, and if they passed those examinations they would continue to be eligible for a local high school diploma.

Listed below are examples of the education community's reaction to the idea that students with disabilities would have to pass state assessments to receive a high school diploma:

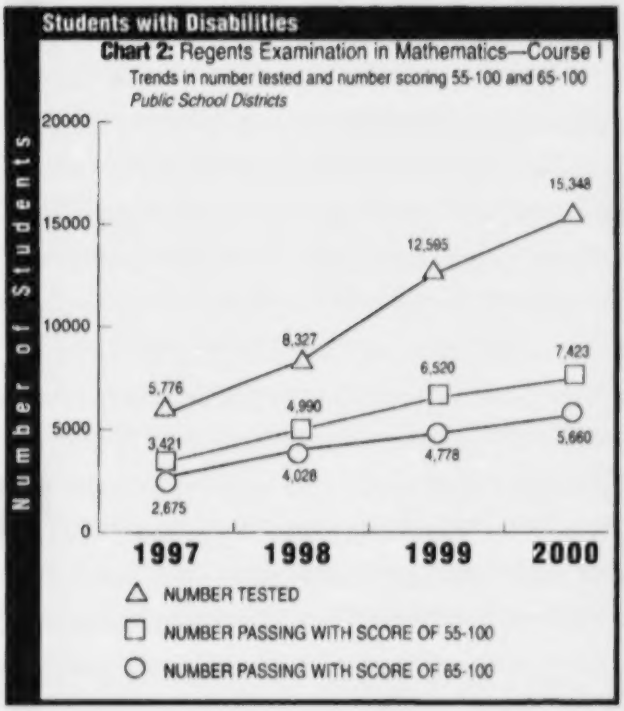
- the new testing requirements are unfair;
- special education students will never be able to pass the tests;
- special education students won't be able to get a diploma and graduate; and
- it will increase drop-outs.

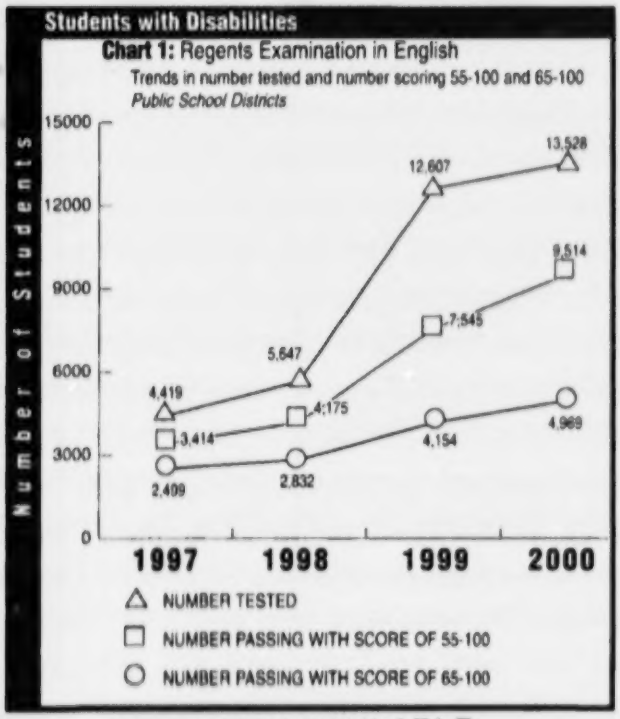
The fascinating thing about these comments is that they were made in the late 1970s when the RCTs were put in place. Yet, by the mid-1990s, about 60 percent of the students with disabilities were passing the competency tests each year. These same issues

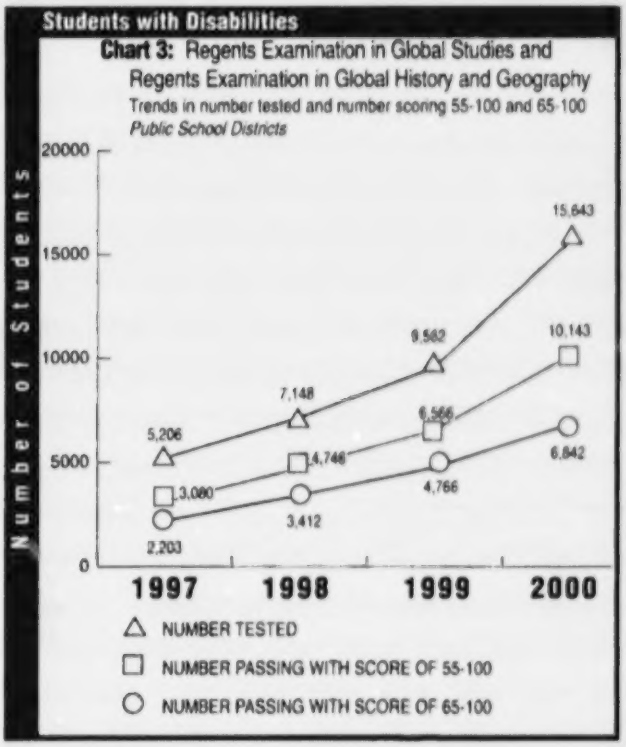
were raised again with this latest Regents policy decision. The question now is whether the critics are right this time, or whether the students will be able to out-perform adult expectations, as they did with the RCTs.

At the same time that this new policy was being implemented, a new school accountability system was being established in the state. As is true in states throughout the country, one of the controversial debates around the new accountability system was to what extent performance data about students with disabilities would be included. Many argued they should not be included for a variety of reasons. These debates exposed a widespread belief that students with disabilities simply could not perform well in academic subject areas despite the fact that the vast majority of students receiving special education services are not severely disabled. Again, after substantial public discussion, the Regents decided that students with disabilities would be included in all accountability measures. Local school districts and the state education department would be responsible for the performance of all students. Performance measures regarding students with disabilities were included:

- on school report cards;
- in calculations to determine the need for a local assistance plan;
- in identifying Schools under Registration Review ("Registration Review" is the state's process for identifying and assisting low-performing schools);
- in determining which schools are furthest from state standards; and
- in determining whether a school is making adequate yearly progress.







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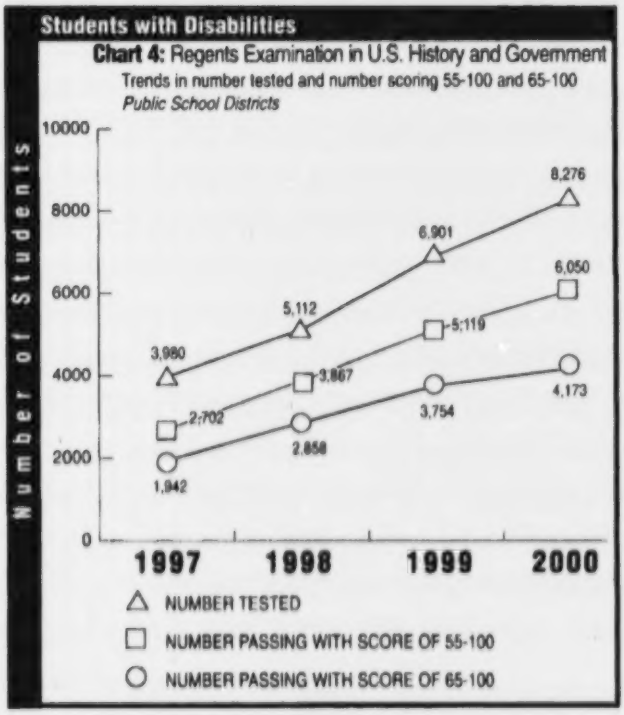
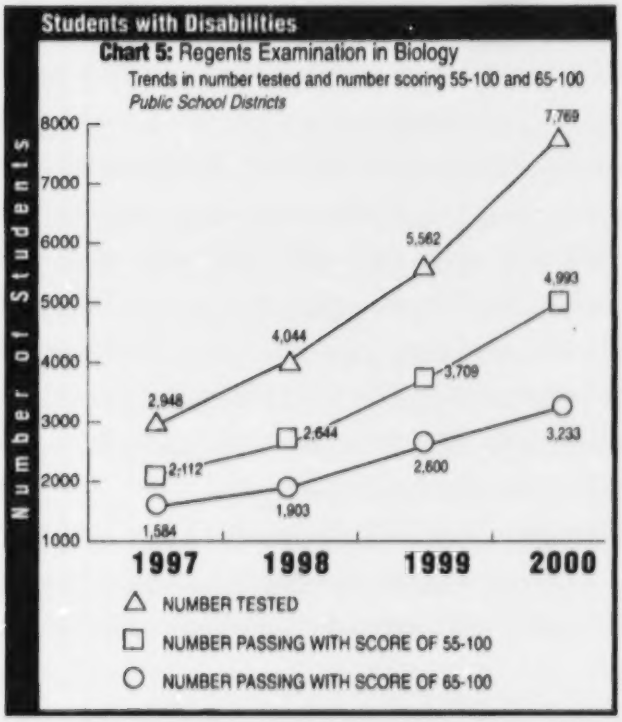




A program of academic intervention services was also established for students who are not performing well on the new 4th- and 8th- grade assessments established as part of the effort to raise standards. It is essential that students with disabilities participate in these assessments, not only because federal statute requires it, but also because the need for academic intervention could be established and services offered specifically to improve academic performance.

Results

What does the data show us so far about the ability of students with disabilities to perform to higher standards? The first year that students graduating from high school in New York State had to pass at least one Regents examination was 1999. Charts 1-5 below and on the previous page track the success of students with disabilities on Regents examinations beginning in 1997.

These data reveal some interesting facts:

- In each case, more students with disabilities were passing Regents examinations in 1999 than took them in 1997.
- There were significant increases in both the participation of students with disabilities in the exams and the passing rates of students with disabilities.
- More students with disabilities passed using the phase-in score of 55-64 than passed at 65 and above.

Also revealing are the data about the use of the RCT as a safety net. Charts 6 and 7 show that for the first two new Regents examinations that became graduation requirements, the number of students with disabilities taking the RCT examinations in those content areas has dropped. This can be linked to the fact that more students with disabilities are passing the Regents examinations and do not need to take the RCTs. Also, even though fewer students are taking the examinations, about the same percentage or greater are passing them. Even though one could surmise that the more capable students no longer take the competency tests, of those who still take it, a greater percentage of them are passing.

I believe a number of improvements are behind the rather dramatic changes revealed by the data:

- School districts are realigning their curriculum and increasing efforts to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.
- Districts are required to give students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in Regents-level coursework and examinations.
- Greater attention is being paid to providing intervention services for students in early grades to improve their academic performance.
- Expectations by families of students with disabilities have increased, and more students with disabilities are expecting the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education.

The analysis of these data over time shows that children were being excluded from opportunities to succeed because of adult expectations related to their disabilities. The data show that when

children are given opportunities and support, they can succeed at significantly greater levels than if those opportunities were not available. The data also show that there is still a tremendous gap between the achievement of students receiving special education services and those in the general education programs. While some of this gap is easily explainable, we still do not know how narrow or how wide it should be. We only know that it should not be as wide as it has been. Given an analysis of the data through the year 2000, the Regents recently extended the special education safety net through 2004. This extension will give districts more time to realign their curriculum and provide for staff development, as well as give students more time to be exposed to the curriculum from the early grades. It also will allow data to be gathered regarding the effect of students with disabilities having to pass multiple Regents examinations as these tests are phased in.

At this time, it is difficult to say what conclusions the Regents will draw after four more years of experience and data analysis. The conclusions, however, will be based on data and factual experience, rather than intuition and emotion. This is one of the most important aspects of how the Regents have strategically approached this issue. One can conclude that their decision to provide opportunities for many students with disabilities, who would have not otherwise had them, has led to dramatic change in achievement and expectations.

In addition, the public dialogue around special education, while still concerned about costs, has moved from a focus almost solely on cost and process to a vigorous dialogue around educational performance and expectations.

This difference can be seen in the following examples of media coverage on these issues, one set in 1996 and one set covering 2000 and 2001:

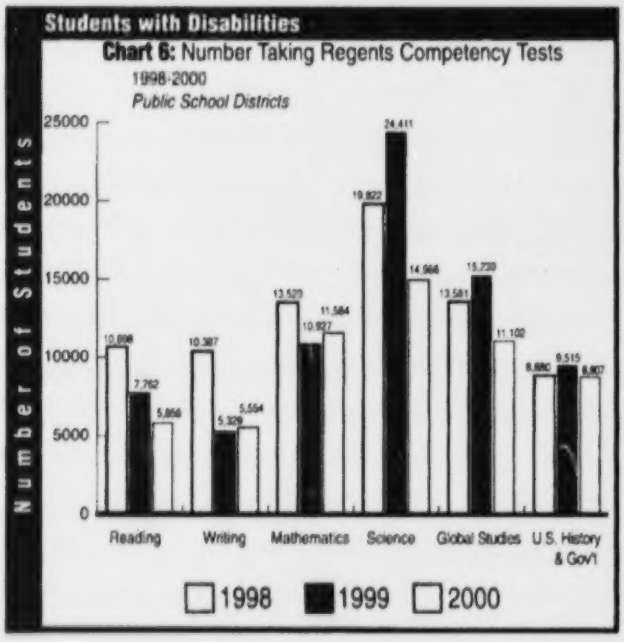
- "Special Ed: Is the Price Too High? Critics Say Soaring Costs for Disabled Students Means Others Suffer," *USA Today*, 17 June 1996;
- "CBS News Looks at Local Schools' Special Ed Costs," *Westchester Gannett News*, 2 April 1996; and
- "'Special Ed' for Tots Costs N.Y. Dearly," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 19 April 1996.

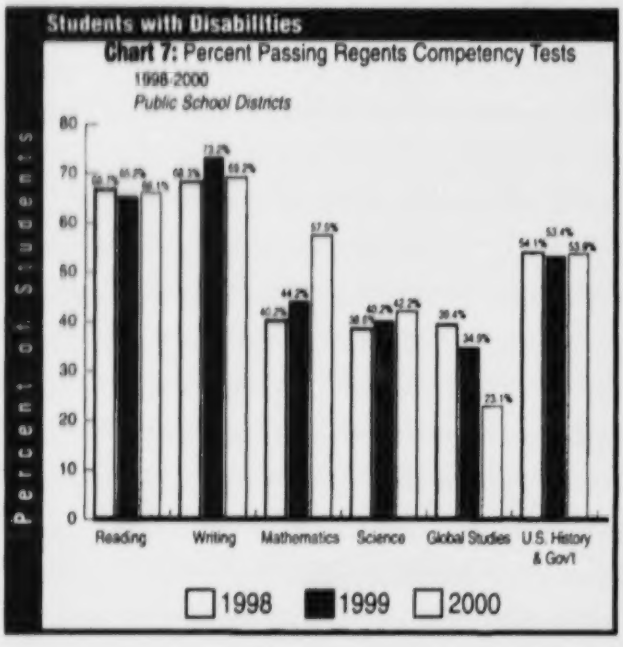
Compare the above with coverage in the past two years:

- "A Ray of Hope in Disabled Kids' Tests," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 5 April 2000;
- "More Special Education Students Taking and Passing the Regents Exam," *New York Times*, 5 April 2000;
- "Regents: Special Education Students Rising to Higher Standards," Associated Press, 23 April 2001; and
- "Special Needs Students Scoring Higher on Tests," *Times Union*, Albany, 24 April 2001.

The laws that have driven special education over the past 25 years to where it is today have had the most profound effect on the educational landscape of any education law or policy during that time. In the end, the value of this effort should be judged by the extent to which students with disabilities, by virtue of their educational experience, grow to be independent adults, participating in and competing for all that life has to offer. That end will not be obtainable for all of these students, but it is way past time to realize that most have a real chance, if we open the door to opportunity for everyone.

Lawrence C. Gloeckler is deputy commissioner for Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities. He is also the current president of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education.





EVERYBODY WINS!

by Toni Strieker and Kent Logan

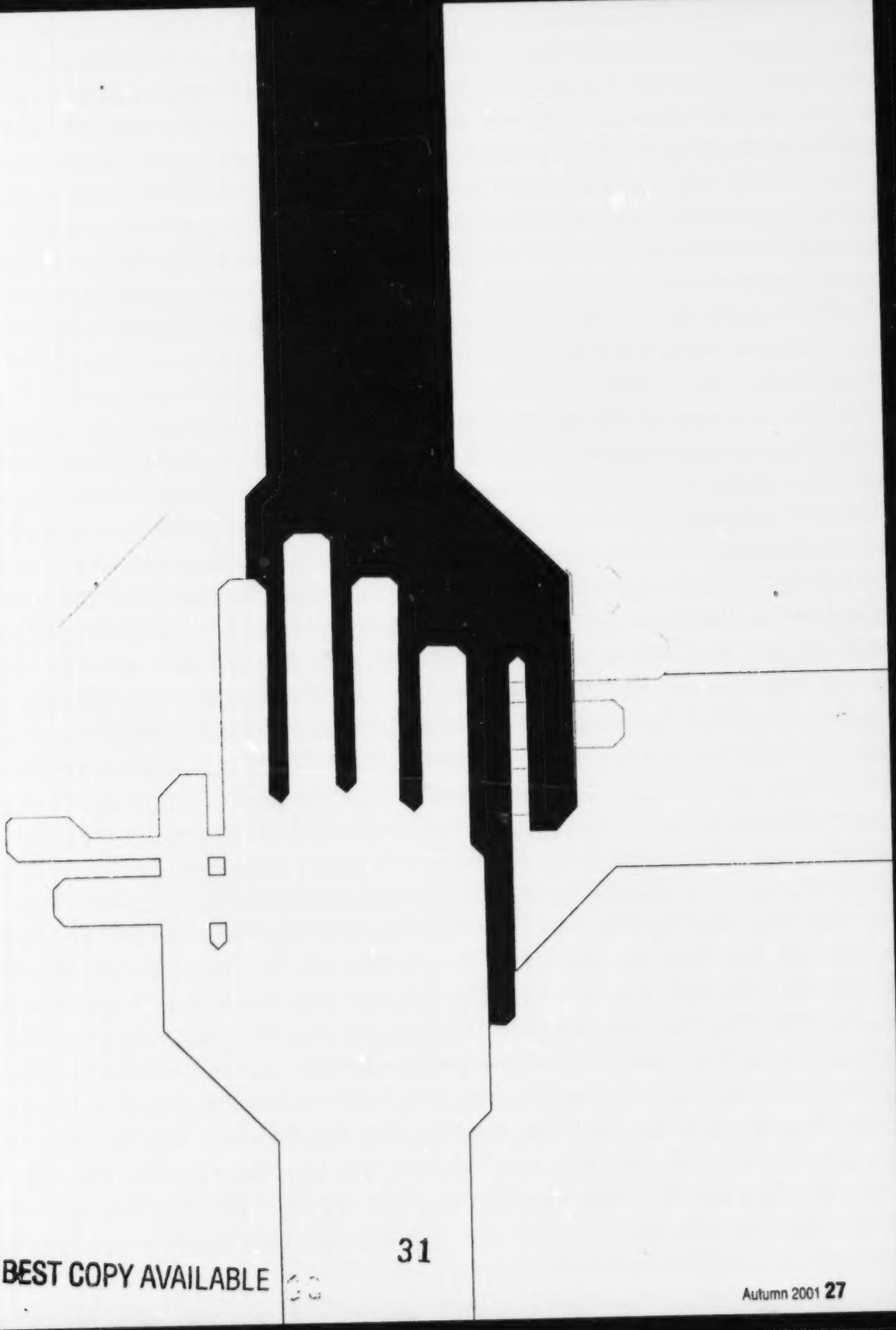
Over the past decade, the reform movement has focused on standards-based reform while also trying to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, including those with disabilities. Standards-based reform calls for clear, concise, rigorous standards for all students.[1] Special education reformers are quick to interpret all as *all*, including students with disabilities.[2] The pace of reform quickened with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 and the release of the final regulations in 1999, with their requirements for increased access of students with disabilities to the general education standards, curriculum, and assessment systems. While IDEA does not legislate inclusion, it clearly signals that only a very small percentage of students with disabilities should be educated outside the general education curriculum and classroom.

In Georgia, the Governor's Council on Development Disabilities (GCDD) collaborated with Kennesaw State University (KSU) to implement Project WINS (Winning Ideas Network of Schools) over a three-year period in eighteen elementary and middle schools in eleven districts across the state of Georgia. Project WINS is a training and technical assistance project designed to assist educators engaged in whole school restructuring and standards-based reform initiatives to meet the needs of diverse learners, including those with disabilities.

Project WINS: Winning Ideas Network of Schools

The mission of Project WINS is to build the capacity of Georgia schools to educate an increasingly diverse student population, including those with disabilities, in the general education classroom within the context of standards-based curriculum (both district and state), with the necessary support provided to teachers and students. To achieve this goal of equity in educational outcomes for all, the educational system must be restructured so that it becomes more flexible and capable of providing equal opportunities for all students to learn.[3] Flexibility and increased capacity of Project WINS' schools are accomplished: (1) by increasing the number of teachers who are knowledgeable (and skilled) in providing research-based, instructional practices in inclusive educational environments; (2) by increasing the number of key stakeholders (including parents) in collaborative problem-solving; (3) by evaluating the outcomes of students with and without disabilities; and (4) by using the results of the evaluation, along with a policy analysis, to identify state and local policies that impede the development of inclusive schools.

Over the past three years, schools in the network have demonstrated how to successfully implement research-based models of inclusion and standards-based reform in Georgia schools using global approaches.[4] Our experience in working with these schools informs us that no one model of inclusive education is purely transportable, because every school context is different. These reforms can only be implemented through collaborative problem solving and action planning, along with capacity building, among key stakeholders.



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Collaborative Problem Solving and Action Planning

The collaboration needed for successful change must be ongoing and must include a wide range of groups, including educators in schools, state agencies, universities, parents, and the community at large. Each WINS school is responsible for assessing its needs and designing a school-wide action plan to move toward greater inclusion of all students in general education classrooms, while maintaining high standards in the general education curriculum and increasing accountability for all. This action plan must address the entire school program, rather than the special education program alone. Similarly, each K-12 feeder path of Project WINS schools is responsible for designing an action plan that minimally assures: (1) inclusive programs at all levels (elementary, middle, and high schools); (2) site-based and job-embedded staff development; and (3) a smooth transition as students move from one grade to the next, from one school to the next, and from school to work.

Capacity Building

Development of inclusive schooling is not, nor should it be considered, solely a special education agenda because of the numerous benefits to non-disabled students. General education curriculum, structures, and practices clearly serve as the context within which individualized services are delivered to all students, including those with significant disabilities. Therefore, besides improving the education for students with disabilities, we also see Project WINS as increasing general education's capacity for educating all students. Capacity-building activities are offered to all teachers, administrators, para-professionals, parents, and therapists. Nearly all of the schools in the Georgia network were provided professional development on topics of inclusion, collaboration and co-teaching, curriculum accommodation and modification, and positive behavior supports, as well as technical assistance describing ways to re-deploy special education teachers, para-professionals, and related service providers. Over the course of three years, each school re-deployed its staff to provide classroom-based services in the general education classroom through collaboration and co-teaching.

For co-teaching to be successful, general and special education staff must be re-deployed. Typically, Project WINS' schools assign resource and self-contained special education teachers and ancillary general education staff (reading, math, early intervention) to grade-level teams. For example, one elementary school of about 500 students typically employs two resource and three self-contained special education teachers and an early intervention literacy teacher. Each K-5 teacher is assigned to a specific grade level and the students she supports are grouped into no more than three classrooms at each grade level. This allows the co-teacher to spend a minimum of two hours per day in each classroom. This schedule necessitates coordination among the general education teachers at each grade level. Since most co-teaching support is provided in language arts and math, teachers must stagger the time of day during which they teach those subjects so the co-teacher can be present. Additional para-professional support is provided for students with more significant behavioral or cognitive disabilities. Finally, it should be noted that through this collaboration and co-teaching model, all students have access to small group instruction. The difference is that the grouping is flexible and groups are formed based upon each student's response to the curriculum. Therefore, students are not grouped on the basis of labels, and students do not need a label to be taught in small groups.

Leadership is a hallmark of a quality school.[5] Leaders in schools assume many different roles, such as principal, curriculum coordinator, lead teacher, and department head, as they construct the school environment and determine how and what students learn, as well as the provision of resources and support to students and staff.[6] Leaders in Project WINS schools typically use site-based management strategies to find the resources so that teachers have time for face-to-face discussions, including (1) collaborative planning between general and special education staff; (2) study groups and teacher reflection on the implementation of best practices; (3) collaboration and co-teaching; and (4) peer mentoring and support for new teachers. Therefore, the success of Project WINS at any school depends heavily upon the quality of leadership in the school.

Project Evaluation of Student Outcomes

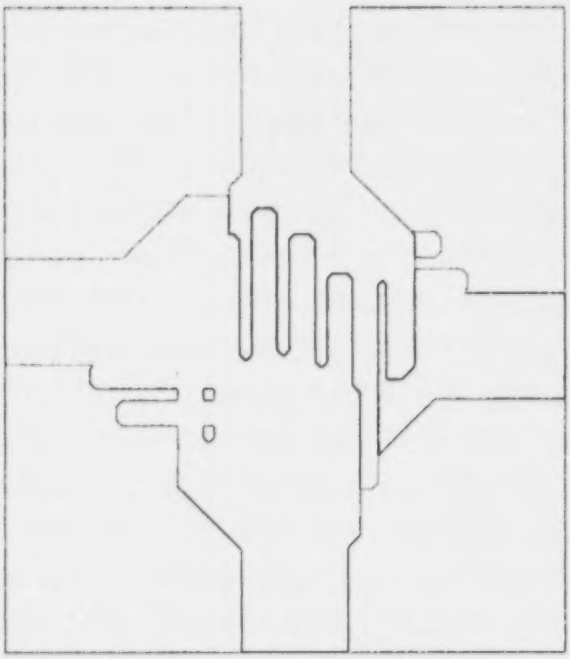
One of the primary fears about inclusion is that it will have an adverse impact on the achievement of peers without disabilities. Over a two-year period, Project WINS collected data (in the form of grades and Iowa Test of Basic Skills [ITBS] scores) on 500 general education students from five project schools (three elementary, two middle). Half were in intervention (co-taught, inclusive classes) classes and half were in control (single teacher taught, non-inclusive) classes. Data showed no statistically significant ($p=.05$) differences in grades or standardized test scores between the general education students in the intervention and control groups. Our data clearly show that there is no adverse impact on general education students when students with disabilities are included in their classrooms with co-teaching support.

A second fear about inclusion is that students with disabilities will not meet their Individual Education Plan (IEP) objectives within the context of the general education classroom. Over a two-year period, Project WINS collected IEP data on 200 students with IEPs at the project schools and analyzed the percentage of time they spent in general education and their mastery of IEP objectives. Using paired sample t-tests, data showed that: (1) students spent significantly more time ($p=.05$) in general education classrooms each year of the study; and (2) there were no statistically significant ($p=.05$) differences in the percentage of IEP objectives they mastered as they were more fully included, compared to previous years when they were either not included or less fully included. These results were consistent across a group of 40 African American students, labeled with mild intellectual disabilities, who moved from self-contained or resource settings in the elementary school to full inclusion at the middle school. In addition, all general and special education teachers reported that they perceived that the IEP objectives in inclusive classrooms were more difficult, more connected to the general education curriculum (Georgia's

Our **data clearly** showed that when provided with **co-teaching support** in general education **classrooms**, students with **IEPs** made **equal progress** on IEP **objectives** that were perceived as **more difficult** and were evaluated **more rigorously** than they had in more **traditional** resource and **self-contained** classrooms. In addition, **two-thirds of the students** showed **increases** in their standardized test scores.

Quality Core Curriculum [GQCC]), and evaluated against a more rigorous standard than they had been prior to inclusion.

The IDEA mandate to include students with disabilities in statewide assessments began in July of 2000. Therefore, the number of students with disabilities who participate in the project and in statewide testing grows each year. After the first two years of the project, enough students with disabilities took standardized tests (ITBS) to analyze changes in their scores. Students at two of the three elementary schools showed a statistically significant ($p=.05$) increase in their standardized test scores during the second year when they were more fully included. Our data clearly showed that when provided with co-teaching support in general education classrooms, students with IEPs made equal progress on IEP objectives that were perceived as more difficult and were evaluated more rigorously than they had in more traditional resource and self-contained classrooms. In addition, two-thirds of the students showed increases in their standardized test scores.



Impact of Project WINS on Curriculum and Professional Policy and Practice

Based upon the outcomes of the Project WINS evaluation, it became apparent that to substantively change and improve services to students with (and without) disabilities, we must alter the policies that drive general and special education at the state, district, and local school levels. Research has demonstrated that while inclusive practices at the classroom or school site can improve the outcomes and experiences for a few students with disabilities, inclusive policies must be implemented at the state and district levels for all students with disabilities to be affected.[7] Furthermore, ineffective and outdated policies often thwart the practices of educators, some of whom are highly skilled in providing inclusive practices.[8] To change the education received by all students with disabilities, we must alter the policies that drive general and special education as well as the state and district practices conducted at the district and building levels.

Over the past two years, Project WINS has collaborated with state and local officials to determine the policy barriers to promoting inclusive practices. Policy analysis was conducted by Project WINS staff using the results of the Project WINS statewide evaluation and the policy framework created by the Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices.[9] The policy framework was originally used in statewide systems change initiatives in four states over a five-year period.[10] This framework describes six policy areas—curriculum, accountability, assessment, professional development, funding, and governance—drawn from federal and state education policy initiatives, the literature on standards-based reform, and the special education literature. In Georgia, once the policy barriers were identified, a set of recommendations for overcoming these barriers was developed and distributed through various existing statewide networks of parents, advocates, and state officials. As described below, Project WINS has so far influenced change in state policy areas of curriculum and professional development.

Curriculum

Students with disabilities who are taught in general education classrooms are exposed to the state standards more often than students who are taught in self-contained classrooms. However, since general and special educators are not adequately prepared to assist students with disabilities to be successful in the general education curriculum, placement of students in general education classrooms does not guarantee that those students

will be successful in the state-approved curriculum.[11] In most states, there is little or no guidance from states and local districts on how to align IEPs with the state standards and how to teach students with disabilities so that they master the approved standards.[12] Project WINS focused training in this area at project schools. These schools now serve as models and mentors for other Georgia schools developing inclusive education within the context of standards-based reform.

Georgia has established a set of common standards, the GQCC, that are subject-specific and academic knowledge- and skills-based. The state has also created the Georgia Learning Connections (GLC), an on-line teacher resource center that houses nearly 3,000 lesson plans and units aligned with the GQCC. In 1999, Project WINS recommended that GLC be expanded to include a new staff position to develop accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, to provide access to the GQCC for students with disabilities. Recommendations for accommodations for students with mild disabilities are presently available. Recommendations for modifications for students with more severe disabilities are in the development stage. We feel that the GLC holds great promise for students with disabilities and their teachers because it provides a one-stop shopping experience and demonstrates how all students can be taught within the context of the GQCC. Thus, with the GLC, the state of Georgia has provided general and special education teachers with a model and guide of how to design one high-quality lesson for all students, including those with disabilities.

Professional Development

Teacher knowledge, communication, and instructional practices are the three most important influences on students' learning.[13] Therefore, school restructuring and reform cannot succeed if it ignores professional development. To modify their daily practices and implement new teaching strategies, educators must have a deep understanding of content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Teachers of students with diverse instructional needs must understand individual needs, as well as standards and curriculum design, so that the learning goals of all students can be achieved.

Since 1998, Project WINS staff have conducted professional development activities for teachers, para-professionals, therapists, and administrators to assist them in providing intensive instruction, responsive to the needs of the individual learner. Training was drawn from the professional literature and included information on:[14]

- enriched instructional content;
- different ways that students learn;
- ways to connect assessment to teaching and learning;
- curriculum accommodation and modification;
- collaboration and co-teaching;
- strategy instruction in self-control, problem solving and basic learning; and
- flexible student groupings (heterogeneous and homogeneous).

WINS training and technical assistance has taken multiple forms including the following: (1) statewide forums and meetings for school administrators; (2) statewide training for physical and occupational therapists, speech pathologists, teachers, administrators, and parents; (3) school-based training, job-embedded professional development, and classroom coaching;[15] (4) teacher study groups and peer collaboration;[16] and (5) presentations to local school boards. Finally, it should be noted that when teachers in Project WINS schools were originally asked to make the necessary changes in their daily practice to include students with disabilities in their classrooms, many teachers were hesitant and uncomfortable. However, with opportunities for professional development and time to learn the new practices, teachers in our schools consistently reported that they were able to increase their teaching competencies and the outcomes of their students.

In July of 2000, the Georgia State Board of Education adopted a policy on inclusion and subsequently funded Project Winning Team. Winning Team is conducted through the Georgia Department of Education's Division of Support Services. While Winning Team mirrors many of the whole school restructuring and reform practices of Project WINS, it is a general education initiative.

Policy Recommendations for State Boards and Legislatures

Based upon our experience and reviews of the literature on state and national policy, it appears that there are additional policy changes necessary to achieve even greater success in schools in Georgia and around the country.[17]

- **Curriculum.** While many states have determined that state standards are appropriate expectations for students with disabilities, research suggests that most states are a long way from determining how the general education curriculum can be accessed by all students.[18] Therefore, state boards of education and state departments of education must provide schools and school teachers with guidance and examples of how the curriculum can be accessed by all students and how IEPs can be linked to the state-approved standards and curriculum.
- **Assessment and Accountability.** States should actively pursue increasing access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities and expand the existing assessment and accountability systems to include the following outcome information on students with disabilities, dissaggegated by race: (1) achievement on standardized and criterion-referenced tests; (2) achievement on alternate assessments; (3) percentage of time spent in general education classrooms (content areas and electives); (4) retention rates; (5) graduation rates; and (6) post-school outcomes.

Finally, databases need to be easily accessible—at no charge—to school officials and the community at large.

- **Professional Development.** To influence classroom teaching and learning practices, states must improve both teacher preparation and other professional development programs. Many states have restructured teacher preparation so that graduates of the program receive initial dual certification in general and special education (e.g., Syracuse University in New York and the University of Vermont). The University of New Mexico recently restructured its teacher preparation program so that all teachers graduate with dual licensure and are prepared to teach all students, including those with significant disabilities in general education classrooms.[19]

  In terms of professional development, there is a substantial body of literature to support the view that traditional forms of professional development (such as workshop offerings to separate groups of teachers and summer training) are not effective in changing teacher practice.[20] Rather, effective staff development is: (1) linked to the building/district strategic plan; (2) "job-embedded"; (3) offered during the school year; and (4) facilitated by a respected instructional leader in the school/district. Finally, we cannot emphasize enough that quality staff development takes time. It takes a great deal of time for teachers to reflect upon their practices, learn new skills, evaluate outcomes, and collaborate with their professional partners. Without adequate time, learning does not occur. Without adequate learning, change does not occur. Without change, schools do not improve.
- **Governance.** Georgia, like many other states (including California, Kentucky, Missouri, and New Mexico), has encouraged site-based management as a strategy to give schools the flexibility they need to deliver successful programs. Changes in governance were adopted for a variety of reasons, one of which was to support the implementation of standards-based reform. The results of these changes in management have had mixed results for students with disabilities. Without consistent state and district policy, site-based management can allow a building principal the option of not including students with disabilities in general education, even though the federal mandate supports it. Therefore, state boards of education and departments of education must provide clear leadership on issues of inclusion, standards-based curriculum, assessment, accountability, and professional development.

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Supporti
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Effective Practices to
Heterogeneous

by Gail M

> *"We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need in order to do this. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't done it so far."*

ng Staff e Schools

Promote Learning in Classrooms

c Gregor

The accountability provisions of both the Elementary and Secondary Education School Act of 1994 (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 have raised the collective interest of policymakers, educators, and parents in our success, to date, in teaching *all* children, including students with disabilities.[1] Increasingly, the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms is being viewed within the larger context of standards-based reform.[2] This means educators must consider the needs of an increasingly diverse student population as they seek out models to guide their school improvement efforts.

At a time when the number and variety of school improvement models are constantly increasing, it is helpful to take time to review what is already known about structures and practices that have proved to be successful in helping classroom personnel meet the needs of a diverse student population. The practices highlighted in this article are not characteristic of a single school improvement model or model of inclusion. Rather, they are strategies and structures with a documented "track record" of effectiveness that support an inclusive philosophy (i.e., meeting individual learner needs without having to isolate students in separate programs). At the same time, these strategies can easily be integrated into reform models focused on improving student performance in one or more content areas.

Role Changes in an Inclusive School

The work of supporting students with diverse needs in general education classes requires all school personnel to make changes in the way they perform their respective roles. These changes are necessary in order to make the transition from self-contained or pull-out models of delivering specialized services (e.g., special education, Title I) to collaborative models of delivering supports within regular classrooms. Table 1 on page 34 highlights shifts in the role of various team members when an inclusive schooling approach is adopted by a school.

Table 1: Role Changes in Inclusive Schools

Team Member	Traditional Responsibilities in a Regular School	Responsibilities in an Inclusive School
SPECIAL EDUCATOR	Provide instruction to students eligible for special education services in resource rooms and/or self-contained special classes.	Collaborate with general education teacher(s) to support the needs of all learners in the regular education class. This may occur through: (a) co-teaching; (b) collaborative consultation; (c) grade-level team membership; (d) participation on problem-solving team; and (e) direct instruction to individual students.
GENERAL EDUCATOR	Provide instruction to students in the general education classroom; refer students for specialized services (e.g., special education, Title I).	Teach all assigned students; seek support and collaborate with special educators and other support personnel to plan and deliver instruction designed to meet the needs of all learners.
GENERAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR	Manage general education program; delegate responsibility for special education students to special education administrator.	Manage general education program; articulate vision for school and provide support for staff; participate as member of problem-solving teams; secure resources to meet the needs of all children in the school.
PARA-EDUCATOR	Work in special education resource room or special classes; provide direct instruction to students; provide self-care services to students.	Provide services to a variety of students in the general education classroom; facilitate peer supports and interaction; support collaborative planning between the general and special education teachers.
RELATED SERVICE STAFF	Evaluate and diagnose problems; provide direct services to students in settings outside of the classroom.	Assess and provide direct services in general education and community settings; train others to carry out support services; collaborate with instructional planning team to integrate supports and design activities.
PSYCHOLOGIST	Test, diagnose, and determine eligibility for admission to special programs.	Collaborate with teachers to define problems and design interventions; team teach; provide social skills training to classes of students; conduct authentic assessments; train students to become conflict mediators, peer tutors, and supports for one another.

Source: Adapted from J.S. Thousand and R.A. Villa, "Managing Complex Change toward Inclusive Schooling," in *Creating an Inclusive School*, ed. R.A. Villa and J.S. Thousand (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1995): 69-71.

Unfortunately, most instructional personnel in schools have been prepared to work alone in their respective roles and classrooms. This makes it critical for expected role changes to be explicitly articulated, planned, and supported through professional development activities. It is not unusual to find teachers frustrated because they are attempting to do their "old job" (i.e., delivering a full complement of pull-out programs) as well as their "new job" (i.e., supporting students in general education classrooms) as a school "tries" inclusion with a small number of students. While this may be seen as an essential "initial" step to help teachers develop new ways of working, it is clearly not a viable long-term approach to deploying staff. Professional development packages such as those created by York-Barr and colleagues can be used by school-based personnel to facilitate such training, necessary discussions, and planning at the individual school level.[5]

Infrastructures that Facilitate Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms

Role changes are solidified when sufficient opportunity is made available for new responsibilities to be learned and carried out. Staffing approaches that encompass instructional teams, a collaborative problem-solving approach, and time within the school day for staff to work collaboratively are structures that support the role changes associated with inclusive schooling practices.

Staff scheduling models. A common approach to collaborative consultation that emerged in the 1980s in response to the integration requirement of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) typically reflected an "expert" model, with specialists conducting observations of students who were experiencing challenges in the general education classroom, followed by suggestions of what the general educator might do differently to increase participation or achievement by the student.[6] Thus, the brunt of the responsibility for supporting students with disabilities in the general education classroom often fell to the regular classroom teacher. Creating dissatisfaction among regular educators, this approach has proven to be frustrating to special educators, too, since pull-out caseloads made it difficult for them to devote enough time and effort for their support to be meaningful to the general educator.[7] This experience, coupled with the increasing diversity in classrooms, has led to scheduling practices that allow for the *on-going involvement* of specialists within the context of the regular education classroom for *mean-*

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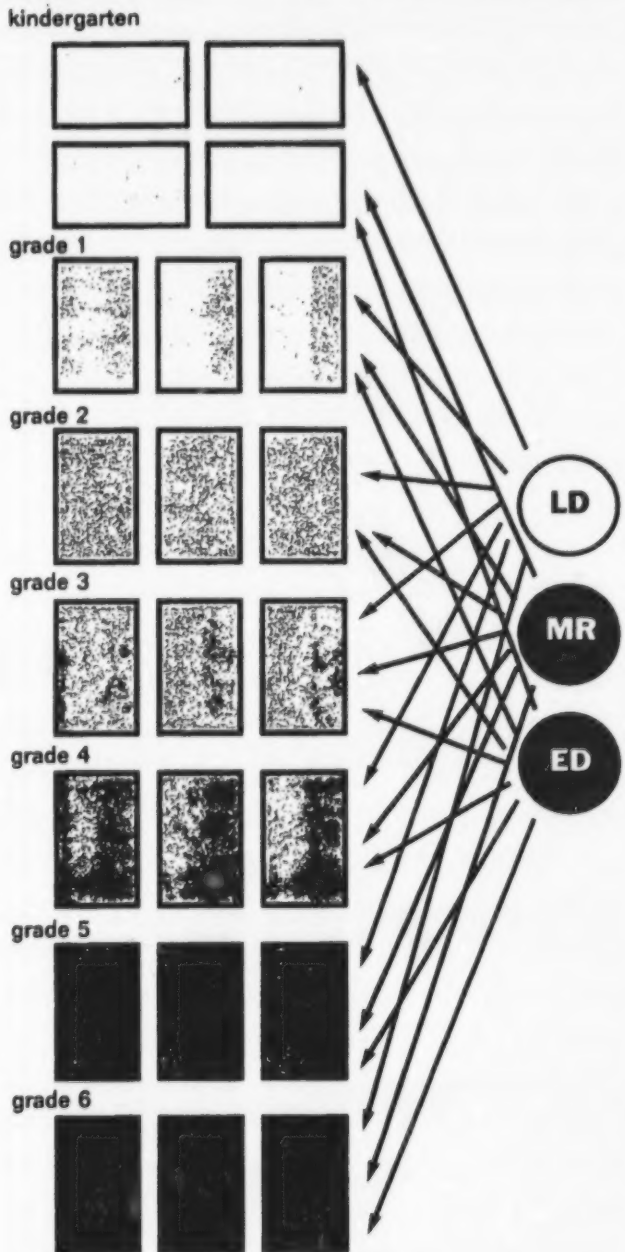
Figure1: Categorical Model of Staffing Elementary Model



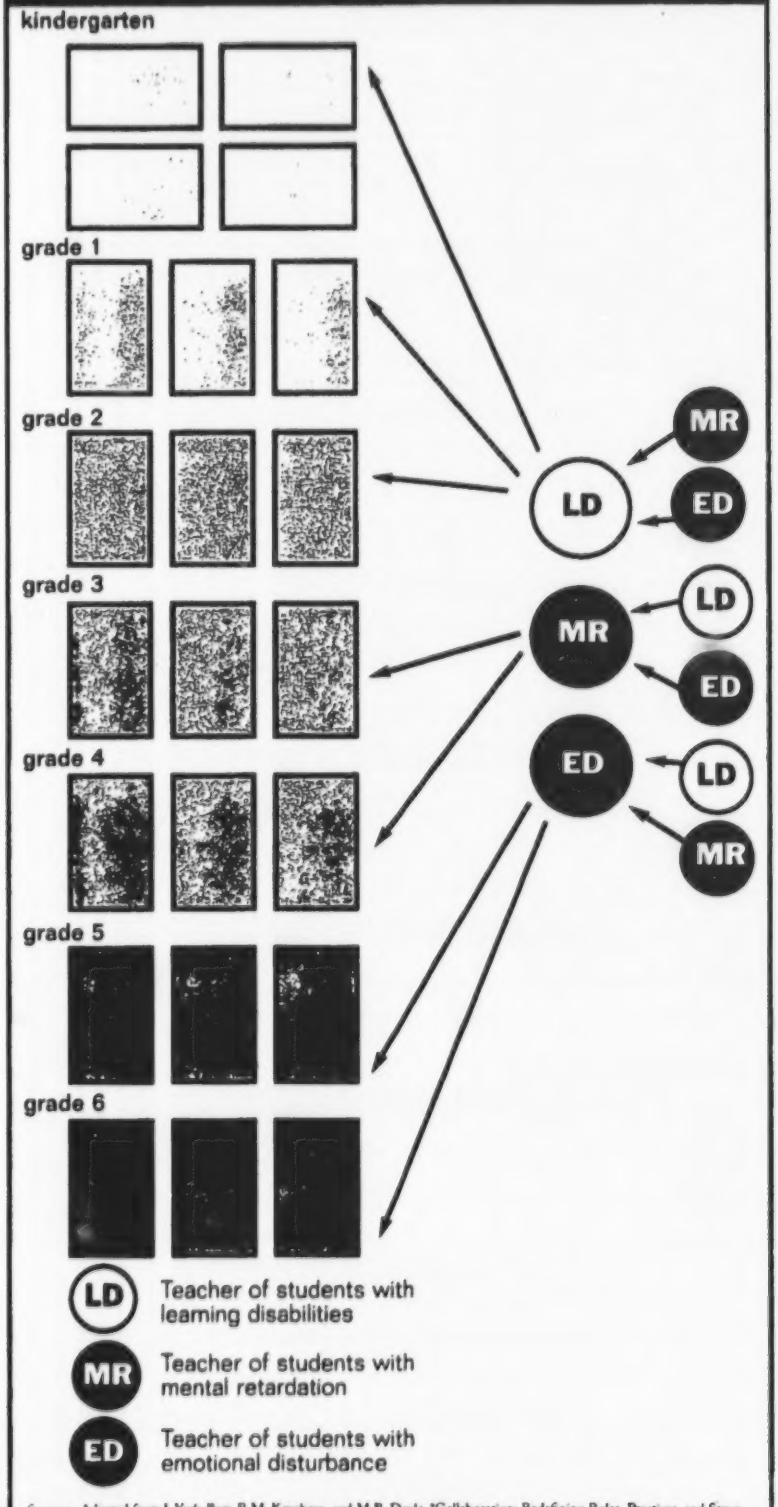
Source: Adapted from J. York-Barr, R.M. Kronberg, and M.B. Doyle, "Collaboration: Redefining Roles, Practices, and Structures," in *Creating Inclusive School Communities: A Staff Development Series for General and Special Educators* (Module 4), ed. J. York-Barr (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1996).

ingful periods of time.[8] The structures most commonly used to achieve these ends are (1) assignment of specialists to teams using non-categorical approaches to support and (2) co-teaching arrangements.

As illustrated in Figure 1 at left, categorical approaches to funding and teacher certification have logically led to categorical support models. In this paradigm, role specialization drives "who" provides services to "whom," minimizing the amount of time a specialist can potentially devote to any one general education teacher due to the number of teachers with whom the specialist must interact. An alternative non-categorical or cross-categorical approach is designed to reduce the fragmentation for individual specialists as they provide in-class support, thereby increasing the amount of time a specialist is able to work collaboratively with a classroom teacher. This approach is grounded in a set of practices and beliefs based on the idea that individual team members, given appropriate training and assistance, can provide supports and services to students in areas that extend beyond the categorical boundaries of their original training. For example, a special educator trained to work with students with mild disabilities can, with appropriate support, learn to work effectively with students with more significant disabilities. Similarly, a reading specialist funded by Title I could, with appropriate direction from a special educator, provide supports to a student with disabilities during reading time in the general education classroom. Figure 2 on page 36 graphically illustrates this alternative approach to staffing and support.

Co-teaching represents another approach to staffing in heterogeneous classrooms that has a growing body of research to suggest its effectiveness.[9] While this can be implemented in a variety of ways, the basic idea is that two or more professionals jointly deliver instruction to a diverse group of students in a classroom.[10] Like other practices addressed in this article, co-teaching involves new roles and responsibilities for teachers, and will require time and professional development opportunities for school personnel to become comfortable with these collaborative approaches.

Figure 2: Non-Categorical Model of Staffing Elementary Model



Source: Adapted from J. York-Barr, R.M. Kronberg, and M.B. Doyle, "Collaboration: Redefining Roles, Practices, and Structures," in *Creating Inclusive School Communities: A Staff Development Series for General and Special Educators* (Module 4), ed. J. York-Barr (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1996).

At the high school level, block scheduling has become a popular response to improve instruction by reducing the incoherence and segmentation associated with the seven to eight-period day.[11] While little research is available that examines the impact of this approach to scheduling on students with disabilities, at least one study has documented generally positive responses among special educators in schools that adopted some form of block scheduling.[12] Relative to other structures that will be reviewed, some special educators in this sample noted that block scheduling provided increased opportunities for collaboration, co-teaching, and sharing of instructional responsibilities for students.

Time for collaboration. If teachers and students are to reap the benefits of a variety of professionals in the general education classroom, it is essential that time is available for them to plan and coordinate their efforts. Many strategies are described in the school change literature. Typically, they fall into one of five general approaches as defined in Table 2 on the opposite page. Whatever the approach or combinations of approaches that are considered, the predictability of knowing that time is available for this work on a regular basis is necessary if any of these approaches to instruction is to succeed.

Problem-solving methods. Supporting students with diverse needs and abilities in the general education class presents unique logistical and instructional issues that require unique approaches and solutions. The use of some form of structured problem solving has emerged as a powerful tool for addressing challenges at both the individual student and classroom level. Further, the process has been found to be effective when it is used by both teachers and students. As discussed by Giangreco and colleagues, a creative problem-solving approach offers professionals the following benefits:[13]

- It results in multiple solutions to a problem, enabling teachers to repeatedly experience the notion that there is more than one "right" answer;

Table 2: Approaches to Finding Time to Collaborate

Time Strategies	Description of Approach
STRATEGY #1: FREED-UP TIME	Provides teachers with time by utilizing one of several approaches to "cover" classes or non-teaching obligations
STRATEGY #2: RESTRUCTURED OR RESCHEDULED TIME	Formally alters the time frame of the school calendar, school day, or teaching schedule
STRATEGY #3: COMMON TIME	Strategic scheduling of prep periods to create common working time for teacher teams
STRATEGY #4: BETTER-USED TIME	Involves strategies to more effectively use time that is currently available
STRATEGY #5: PURCHASED TIME	Requires budgeted funds for additional staff or substitute time to provide classroom instruction and free up teachers to collaborate

Source: National Education Association, *Time Strategies* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1994).

- It actively encourages the use of problem-solving skills that are valuable both in and outside of school;
- It enables teachers to actively model the notion that we all can learn from each other, and no one person always knows the best thing to do;
- It distributes the responsibility for coming up with solutions to issues that emerge in the classroom;
- It expands options available to teachers to provide supports to diverse groups of students in the general education classroom; and
- It is an excellent strategy for teachers to use to actively share responsibility with students for decisions about what occurs in their classrooms.

Curricular and Instructional Practices for Heterogeneous Classrooms

Even as states and local districts adopt standards to specify what students need to learn, the question of how critical content is best taught remains an issue that is typically addressed at the school and classroom levels. Zemelman and his colleagues have summarized common conclusions based on recommendations from a wide range of national education organizations, projects, and research.[14] This information is presented in Table 3.

Responsive instructional practices. The observations in Table 3 reflect a dissatisfaction that our most capable students are not being adequately challenged in the classroom, while academically less proficient students do not succeed in a curriculum that "ignores their background, minimizes their motivation for academic work, and prepares them neither for advanced education nor for the technical demands of new vocational options."[15] Given the broad interest in this issue, it is not surprising that there are many instructional approaches, both new and old, that are explicitly designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of a wide range of learners. Models like differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, and teaching to learning styles exemplify general approaches to instruction that are built upon a foundation that recognizes the diverse abilities of students and the differences in the way they learn.[16]

Table 3: Common Conclusions about Curriculum and Instructional Practices

we need LESS...	we need MORE...
whole-class, teacher-directed instruction	experiential, inductive, hands-on learning
student passivity: sitting, listening, receiving, and absorbing information	active learning in the classroom, with all the attendant noise and movement of students doing, talking, and collaborating
prizing and rewarding of silence in the classroom	emphasis on high-order thinking; learning a field's key concepts and principles
classroom time devoted to fill-in-the-blank worksheets, dittos, workbooks, and other "seatwork"	deep study of a smaller number of topics, so that students internalize the field's way of inquiry
student time spent reading textbooks and basal readers	time devoted to reading whole, original, real books and nonfiction materials
attempts by teachers to thinly "cover" large amounts of materials in every subject area	responsibility transferred to students for their work: goal-setting, record-keeping, monitoring, evaluation
rote memorization of facts and details	choice for students (e.g., picking books, writing topics, team partners, research projects)
stress on the competition and grades in school	enacting and modeling of the principles of democracy in school
tracking or leveling of students into "ability groups"	attention to affective needs and the varying cognitive styles of individual students
use of pull-out special programs	cooperative, collaborative activity; developing the classroom as an interdependent community
use of and reliance on standardized tests	heterogeneously grouped classrooms where individual needs are met through inherently individualized activities, not segregation of bodies
	delivery of special help to students in regular classrooms
	varied and cooperative roles for teachers, parents, and administrators
	reliance upon teachers' descriptive evaluation of student growth, including qualitative/anecdotal observations

Source: S. Zemelman, H. Daniels, and A. Hyde, *Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), 4-5.

Strategies and supports to accommodate individual needs. Even in settings in which responsive teaching practices are utilized, students with disabilities still require specific strategies and supports to address their individual needs. The Strategies Intervention Model associated with Don Deshler and colleagues at the University of Kansas represents an effective approach to help students with mild disabilities learn "how to learn" in the general education classroom.[17] For students with more severe disabilities, planning models are available to guide instructional teams in determining *when*, *how*, and with *what supports* students can be involved in general education activities and still work on the priority learning needs reflected in their Individual Education Plans.[18]

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: Supporting A Heterogeneous Mix of Students in the Classroom

There is no single approach or combination of strategies that are readily transferrable from one school to another in an effort to support the needs of all students in general education classrooms. The varying contexts and resources of each setting necessitate the creation of a building-based plan that address the unique issues of each individual school and district. At the same time, there are identifiable characteristics, highlighted in this discussion, that have emerged as common, successful practices among schools seeking to adopt inclusive schooling practices. High-quality professional development is necessary at the building and district level to guide this process to support school staff through the process of defining, implementing, and refining the new roles and responsibilities associated with helping all students benefit from instruction in heterogeneous classrooms.[19]

Gail McGregor is project director and principal investigator at the Rural Institute on Disabilities at the University of Montana.

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8. J. Meyers, L.M. Gelzheiser, and G. Yelich, "Do Pull-In Programs Foster Teacher Collaboration?" *Remedial and Special Education* 12, vol. 2 (1991): 7-15.
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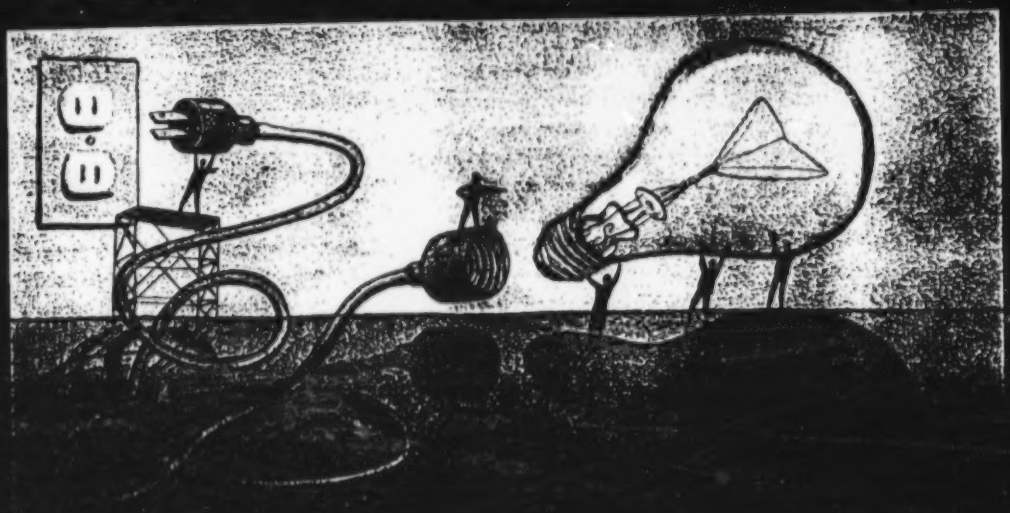
The IDEA Partnerships



Sharing the Implementation of IDEA

INTRODUCTION

The year 1997 was a landmark for students with disabilities and the education system that serves their needs. Through a unique and participatory reauthorization process, constituent groups worked in partnership with Congress and the Administration to help assure that students with disabilities were included in the educational reforms that dominated the public policy agenda. Consequently, the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) made an important shift from IDEA's previous focus on physical access to programs in favor of a more systemic focus on curricular access, progress, and results.[1]

This new systemic focus demanded that an expanded list of stakeholders be engaged in a shared effort to implement the statute. Increasingly, it became important to consider special education within the context of general education reform. It also became critically important to bring special educators, general educators, policymakers, and families together to create a common vision for the implementation of IDEA.

PARTNERSHIPS: A National Strategy for Improving Results

In 1998, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded four partnership projects and charged them with engaging important national membership groups and others in the implementation of the 1997 Amendments to IDEA. Each Partnership was designed to address the information and technical assistance needs of a particular audience: policymakers, administrators, service providers, and families and advocates. Individually, each Partnership engages their affiliated organizations in activities designed to meet the unique needs of their members and to explore their organizations' role in IDEA implementation. Together the four IDEA Partnerships engage all partners in pursuing education issues of common interest and national importance.

The IDEA Partnerships are one important mechanism through which the shared implementation of IDEA is pursued. Each Partnership fosters understanding with one particular audience. Collectively, the four Partnerships create opportunities to share these understandings across their audiences so that each can better comprehend the complexity of the issues associated with the implementation of the statute. This deeper understanding then allows the Partnerships to promote collective action across all audiences to address issues of common concern.

With the funding of the IDEA Partnerships, OSEP entered into a new relationship with the field. The design of the Partnership projects acknowledges the multiple perspectives of key groups and seeks to learn from them and from their interactions with each other. With OSEP as a full partner, policymakers, implementers, and consumers are connected in new ways that provide them with opportunities to jointly examine current and emerging issues in education and offer appropriate responses.

Given the influence and authority that state boards exert across the nation, the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) is a critical partner in the IDEA Partnerships. Through its status as a primary partner in the Policymaker Partnership, NASBE pursues issues that are of importance to state boards and carries its message to OSEP and the one hundred organizations within the IDEA Partnerships.

by Joanne Cashman and Elizabeth Laflin

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"Failure is not an option when it comes to educating all students."

Brenda Lilienthal Welburn, Executive Director, NASBE

The IDEA Partnerships

ASPIRE at the Council for Exceptional Children
Association of Service Providers Implementing IDEA Reforms in Education
www.ideapractices.org
1-877-CECIDEA (toll free)
703-264-9480 (TDD)

FAPE at the PACER Center
Families and Advocates Partnership for Education
www.fape.org
1-888-248-0822 (toll free)
612-827-7770 (TTY)

IUAD at the Council for Exceptional Children
IDEA Local Implementation by Local Administrators
www.ideapractices.org
1-888-248-0822 (toll free)
703-264-9480 (TDD)

PMP at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education
Policymaker Partnership
www.ideapolicy.org
1-877-IDEA-INFO (toll free)
703-519-7008 (TDD)

THE POLICYMAKER PARTNERSHIP: Building the Capacity to Collaborate within Partnerships

The Policymaker Partnership (PMP) is operated by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and brings together three kinds of partners. *Primary partners* are important groups that have influence or authority in areas that affect IDEA issues and implementation. *Supporting partners* include other important groups that have committed to strategic participation and dissemination. *Linking partners* are federally funded centers, other research organizations, and technical assistance providers that have expertise in areas that are of interest to the primary partners. The Policymaker Partnership is the conduit that permits the exchange of information and assistance across the partners at all levels. More importantly, PMP joins partners in pursuing issues of common interest and invites OSEP to join them in seeking new opportunities.

Within PMP, four types of activities are designed to meet partner needs and foster interaction. First, *supporting activities* are targeted to information needs. With partner involvement, the PMP website has been organized into topical "miniwebs" that present important documents from the OSEP website, the OSEP technical assistance and dissemination network, the IDEA Partnerships, and each of the PMP primary partners. Additionally, a toll-free information line is available to all partners and their constituents.

Second, *participatory activities* build understanding among primary partners and help partners to identify shared interests and issues. Routinely, PMP partners identify important events within their organization and invite other partners to participate. Following this participation, partners reflect on related issues in their organizational agendas and identify ways in which additional interaction may be pursued.

Third, as partners identify shared issues and interests, they seek wider participation in planning and conducting important events within their respective organizations. As this occurs, the organizations seek support from PMP to develop *collaborative activities* within their organization or initiate new jointly sponsored activities. These collaborative activities contribute a broader participation and multiple perspectives to discussions that may otherwise have been narrower in the treatment of shared issues.

Fourth, when it becomes clear that one or several of the primary partners is positioned to lead an activity that is of high priority among the primary partners and OSEP, that partner works with PMP to develop the support for that activity. These *lead activities* are designed to engage the decisionmakers that have authority and influence in the issues identified. Whenever possible, PMP partners and representatives of the other IDEA Partnerships contribute multiple perspectives through their advice or participation.

STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND PMP

In 2000, NASBE joined with 24 other national organizations that are members of the IDEA Partnerships in creating a workgroup focusing on early childhood education. The workgroup meets quarterly to jointly direct the development of a network linking policymakers with implementers and consumers. The Early Childhood Environmental Scanning Network allows member organizations and OSEP to review synthesized reports of promising practices from reporters and scanners nationwide and to pose questions to the field. In 2002, the Early Childhood Work-

The Policymaker Partnership

The Policymaker Partnership is committed to improving the capacity of policymakers to act as informed change agents who focus on improving outcomes for all, including students with disabilities. Its eleven primary partners are:

- the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- the American Association of School Administrators
- the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- the Council of Chief State School Officers
- the Education Commission of the States
- the Higher Education Consortium of Special Education
- the National Association of State Boards of Education
- the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
- the National Conference of State Legislatures
- the National Governors Association
- the 100 Black Men of America

group will host a national meeting focusing on the shared challenges of its member organizations. This effort is informed by NASBE's identification of early childhood education as an organizational focus for 2001. NASBE will be a key partner in this meeting, allowing the priorities of state boards to reach a larger audience. The meeting will also help the association identify new partners in moving its organizational priorities forward, while giving other partners an opportunity to draw from NASBE's work in this area.

One of the activities initiated by NASBE in partnership with PMP was a May 2001 conference that drew 18 state teams to New Orleans to pursue the alignment of early childhood and special education systems. The approach used in conducting the Early Childhood Conference mirrored the highly successful strategy NASBE has used in recent years to engage key individuals at the state level in a manner that acknowledges their states' shared issues and respects their individual differences. Team members included state board members, state directors of special education, and individuals from agencies responsible for the early childhood programs within their state systems. Each attendee received a CD, developed through the collaboration of NASBE, PMP, and the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NECTAS), containing important early childhood research and practice information. In action planning sessions, participating teams identified important strategies to positively impact state systems.

Based on these state planning documents, NASBE and PMP offered $10,000 seed grants to enable the plans to move forward. Following a review of the action steps outlined in the proposals, six states were awarded grants to actualize their individual approaches (see chart). These initiatives will be carried out during the 2001-2002 school year and will be followed with great interest by NASBE, PMP, OSEP, members of the Early Childhood Workgroup, and other organizations in the IDEA Partnerships.

State boards of education have also proved to be a critical voice in the IDEA Partnerships in other ways. In the First National Summit on the Shared Implementation of IDEA in June, state board members and NASBE staff participated as 'delegates' in the intensive discussion of five national issues (see box on page 42). In these discussions, the full range of stakeholders responded to key research findings and promising practices. Then, through a "shared reflection," they interpreted the information from the perspective of their constituent groups. In this way, the summit began a national effort to understand what it will take to make research useful for policy and practice. The resounding endorsement from summit participants has stimulated new support for deeper and more frequent cross-stakeholder examination of IDEA issues.

THE FOCUS ON STATE-LEVEL COLLABORATION: New Understandings, New Opportunities

Evaluation data from the First National Summit indicated that the IDEA Partnerships should continue national discussions and expand state-level engagement. Overwhelmingly, participants from each of the Partnership audiences identified the importance of moving the discussions to state levels.

NASBE/PMP State Seed Grants to Improve the Alignment of Early Childhood and Special Education Systems[2]

State	Purpose	Strategy
Illinois	Increase local awareness of the need to serve young children with disabilities in natural settings	Create a state training curriculum including screening, referral and identification, needed services, curricular strategies and inclusion of children with disabilities in natural settings
Kansas	Expand and enhance existing partnerships among agencies that serve young children	With the Children's Cabinet, co-sponsor a policy conference for state agency leaders and educators on school readiness
Louisiana	Support a cross-agency partnership in implementing new voluntary preschool legislation	Build the infrastructure for state and regional collaboration necessary to support the new legislation through: • Cross-agency state planning meetings, • Regional information meetings, and • Facilitating local teams and creating a system for state support of teams
Massachusetts	Improve transition between the early intervention and early childhood systems, with special focus on families as full partners	Build on the existing coalition *Working Together* and actively involve the Federation for Children with Special Needs. Develop "family-friendly" materials
Ohio	Support policy development for agency roles at key transition points	Collaboratively develop an initial policy statement. Take statewide testimony around the initial statement to inform a cogent state board policy statement that would be widely distributed
Wyoming	Enhance the state's ability to assist state decisionmakers in addressing policy issues related to the development of a comprehensive, coordinated infrastructure for early childhood education and special education services	Collaboratively build a data collection system that supports efforts for systemic change and advances the Governor's initiative for policy action that supports coordinated efforts.

The IDEA Partnerships understand the great potential of this type of cross-stakeholder engagement. They realize that it is important to direct new activity to the state level. As a result, the IDEA Partnerships will focus on and facilitate new and increased opportunities for national discussions within the states that will foster new understandings and state-level collaboration.

To enable such discussions, each of the IDEA Partnerships will set aside $250,000 for collaborative activities across the four

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First National Summit on Shared Implementation

For the first time in the history of special education, stakeholders representing varied, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives met in Washington, DC in June to learn how they could work together to implement IDEA. Over 700 people, including families, teachers, related service personnel, advocates, legislators, school board members, principals, state directors of special education, and others involved in implementing IDEA, attended the "Partners Make a Great IDEA: A National Summit on the Shared Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act." It was sponsored by the IDEA Partnerships, a coalition funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Experts, researchers, and local teams presented on the summit's five major topics related to IDEA implementation:

- School climate and discipline,
- Including children with disabilities in standards-based reform,
- Family involvement in special education,
- Disproportionate representation of minority children in special education, and
- Personnel issues.

The summit also included a delegate strand in which 80 representatives of each of the four Partnerships discussed the challenges facing IDEA implementation and created a list of possible collaborative activities to move implementation forward.

Presenter lists, papers, and handouts from the summit can be found at www.ideainfo.org. All keynote sessions were videotaped and can also be viewed at this website. Finally, summaries of delegate discussions and recommendations for future action will be posted on the site when available.[3]

audiences. In total, $1,000,000 will be devoted to cross-stakeholder interaction and shared IDEA implementation strategies.

Many new opportunities and invitations will emerge in the coming months. NASBE will extend these invitations to state board members and disseminate summary documents to its members, constituents, and stakeholders.

IMPROVING RESULTS FOR ALL STUDENTS: Our Common Challenge

The measure of success in the educational system of the 21st century will be the ability to deliver positive educational results to all students, including students with disabilities. NASBE Executive Director Brenda Lilienthal Welburn articulated the common challenge when she asserted, "Failure is not an option when it comes to educating all students." NASBE was an early leader in bringing students with disabilities into the education reform agenda. The Policymaker Partnership and the IDEA Partnerships are committed to work with state boards of education in strengthening the shared commitment to meet the challenge and facilitate success.

Joanne Cashman is director of the Policymaker Partnership at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. Elizabeth Laflin is a doctoral student in special education at George Washington University and is a leadership intern with the Policymaker Partnership.

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1. Office of Special Education Programs, *IDEA '97 and the Final Part B Regulations: Major Issues of Interest to All Audiences* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 1999). Available online at http:// www.ideapolicy.org.
2. National Association of State Boards of Education, *State Planning Grant Proposals on Early Childhood Education/Special Education* (Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education, 2001).
3. IDEA Partnerships, *First National Summit Brings Groups Together* (Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Policymakers Partnership, 2001). Available online at http://www.ideainfo.org.

To enable such discussions, each of the IDEA Partnerships will set aside $250,000 for collaborative activities across the four audiences. In total, $1,000,000 will be devoted to cross-stakeholder interaction and shared IDEA implementation strategies.

Many new opportunities and invitations will emerge in the coming months. NASBE will extend these invitations to state board members and disseminate summary documents to its members, constituents, and stakeholders.

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Washington Notebook

by David Griffith

As the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization staggers to a conclusion, so too ends school choice advocates' hope to enact voucher legislation at the federal level. The bad news goes far beyond the failure to include vouchers in the pending K-12 federal education law. History will note ESEA 2001 as the voucher forces' Gettysburg—the doomed, highwater mark of a lost cause.

It was not supposed to end like this. For voucher supporters, the year started off with more promise than had been seen in decades. The stars were finally aligned—a supportive President and like-minded Republican-controlled Congress (both the House *and* Senate back in January) were finally going to push vouchers through, while the Supreme Court agreed to revisit the constitutionality of public money going directly to religious schools by hearing the Cleveland voucher case. How, then, did defeat come so quickly and completely?

For all of the voucher sound and fury, it really did signify nothing. Voucher proponents' claims of momentum were either hubris or unfounded overconfidence. The fact is that the votes aren't there in either the Senate or the House to pass any kind of voucher legislation. So long as suburban voters are content with their own schools, there will never be enough support among moderate Republicans representing swing districts to enact any kind of expansive voucher plan.

Because one of the primary considerations these parents made in moving to the community they did was the quality of the schools—in essence executing their own personal school choice system—they have no need to seek out other schools or support a government-sponsored school choice program. Indeed, these parents have every incentive to *prevent* an influx of out-of-area students from some untested voucher scheme that isn't likely to benefit them in the least. (This is precisely the reason the voucher strategy has shifted in recent years to focus on urban minority families.)

Vouchers were such a non-starter that they never made it into the original Senate bill drafted by committee chairman Jim Jeffords (I-VT) and an experimental pilot program in the House was rejected in committee. Indeed, the President never fought for vouchers, and it was one of the first contentious issues jettisoned in the reauthorization process.

But this tactical setback was nothing compared to the overwhelming strategic defeat that is in the offing. Sealing vouchers' doom, perhaps permanently, is the triumph of the national accountability system for which President Bush *did* fight.

As it has been for a number of years in the states, accountability is the new buzz word in Washington, DC. Accountability for achievement. Accountability for resources. And the Achilles heel of vouchers is accountability. The only accountability in private school vouchers is the competition of the free market (with the presumption, too often false, that private schools are better than public schools). According to this economic theory, school quality will improve because educators are competing for consumers who are seeking the best available services. Unfortunately, the free market cannot truly ensure quality—if it did, the tread on Firestone tires wouldn't have separated and Ford Explorers wouldn't have rolled over.

The Bush-crafted ESEA will include a national accountability system that will apply to every public school in the country. States will be compelled to test in reading and math in grades 3-8 in order to give parents greater information about their child's academic achievement and to hold schools accountable for the educational services they provide with public funds. In this system, how can anyone argue that a private or religious school that receives public funding could be exempt from state testing and accountability standards?

Although religious schools that currently provide Title I services do not have to participate in state assessments, this is only because of the relatively minor per capita stipend that accompanies each Title I student. You can be sure that these schools would have to administer state tests if the amount of public money received was in the thousands of dollars per student that a voucher would provide.

Administering high-stakes state tests at a private school, which would almost certainly have to be preceded by adopting the state's standards and the local curriculum, essentially turns the school into ... a public school. Thus, any private school positioned to receive public monies as part of any conceivable future voucher plan will likely decline the opportunity because of the accountability provisions enacted now by President Bush.

Of course, any debate over vouchers at the federal level is pointless because of the of the minuscule Title I per capita allocation, approximately $700, which is much too little to cover private or parochial school tuition. The real action is at the state level. But even there the same accountability principle still applies, which is why the truly knowledgeable voucher adversaries have moved on to the more sophisticated issue of K-12 tuition tax credits.

As for vouchers, they will soon go the way of the former Soviet Union, a flimsy proposition built on an untenable foundation. The great Cold War warrior Ronald Reagan spoke of a concept back then that is the ultimate undoing of vouchers today: "Trust, but verify."

David Griffith is NASBE's director of governmental affairs.

State Innovations

Indiana's Alternative Electronic Assessment for Students with Disabilities

In order to meet the new federal requirement that states develop alternative assessments for students with severe disabilities, the Indiana Department of Education joined with Purdue University to create an accountability system utilizing electronic portfolios as a means to measure the progress of students who are unable to take the regular statewide exams.

The electronic portfolio consists of a laptop computer loaded with special assessment software to be used in collecting and documenting a student's work and performance. Perhaps the most unique feature of the electronic portfolio is that each computer can be connected to a small, handheld video camera that can record a student's activities and answers. Additional peripherals can include a digital camera, scanner, and microphone. The equipment is so small and inconspicuous that students quickly become accustomed to its presence. The digitized photos or streaming video are downloaded to the computer and saved for reference or documentation that a student has successfully completed an answer or task. In addition, audio can either accompany the video or be recorded on its own, and scanners allow student work on paper to be transferred into electronic files.

The end product is an assessment model that utilizes an electronic portfolio to measure individually appropriate progress toward meeting essential skills and proficiencies, including academics, that can be linked to instruction and curriculum so that these too can be analyzed for educational effectiveness.

Under the all-encompassing title of **Indiana Assessment System of Educational Proficiencies (IASEP)**, the program has three separate assessment system components. According to the state, IASEP is to be used for K-12 students who through a case conference committee determination will not pursue a diploma. The system is designed for students "whose instructional programs focus on outcomes in broader domains such as social adjustment, vocational skills, and recreation, in addition to functional and academic literacy."

The IASEP software is programmed to assess over 1,000 skills covering one academic and four personal growth (or "functional") areas, including:

- **Social Adjustment**, such as social interaction, communication, and group dynamics;
- **Personal Adjustment**, such as personal care and responsibility and daily life skills;
- **Vocational Experience**, such as occupational skills and work ethic;
- **Recreation and Leisure**, such as healthy lifestyles and hobbies; and
- **Academic Skills**, such as language, math, science.

The skills are rated according to their difficulty level—easiest, moderately difficult, most difficult—and teachers select twenty "core essential skills" (from the 1,000 total) in each of the five areas. Thus, the electronic portfolio assesses 100 total skills (20 x 5) of varying degrees of difficulty that are custom-designed to each student's strengths and education needs. Teachers are trained to use a rating rubric and evaluation criteria that allow them to score a student's performance.

The laptop computers, video, and digital cameras allow teachers to record and document student performance on an on-going basis. Although the reporting phase of the electronic portfolio is still in development, the state will ultimately issue state-level aggregate reports and disaggregated data, as well as personal evaluations, to individual parents.

The IASEP also includes an early childhood component, the **Indiana Assessment System for Educational Proficiencies: Early Childhood (IASEP:EC)**. While it is modeled after the main IASEP, there are minor but important differences owing to the age of the children who use it. Though the early childhood software has five general areas, they are distinctly different from the growth areas used for older children:

- **Cognitive**—includes math, language, science, and social studies;
- **Communication**—includes receptive language, expressive language, and language/literacy concepts;
- **Self-Help**—includes eating, toileting, dressing, personal care, responsibility, and safety;
- **Sensory Motor**—includes gross motor, fine motor, sensory, dressing and feeding; and
- **Social**—includes social interactions, problem solving, adaptive behavior, behavioral expectations, and personal/relational concepts.

Also, the program contains only hundreds of skills as opposed to the 1,000 included in the main IASEP.

The electronic portfolio has proven so successful that another related assessment instrument—**Documentation of Indiana Academic Standards (DIAS)**—is being piloted by the state to collect information on the progress of students with less severe disabilities toward meeting the state's general education standards. The DIAS reports on:

- Present levels of performance;
- Measurable annual goals;
- Statement of services to be provided;
- How progress will be measured;
- Review and revision of students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs); and
- Additional measures of a students' progress, as required by their IEPs.

It is hoped that DIAS will be a valuable tool in identifying students' academic needs so that instruction can be targeted to specific subjects or knowledge areas to help students meet the standards.

The electronic portfolios have been well-received by parents, many of whom are pleased that the state now has a systematic method of evaluating students with severe disabilities. Parents' primary concern has been the confidentiality of their children's records. Though privacy laws cover electronic as well as paper student records, because IASEP schoolwork is stored in an easily duplicated format—and because these records usually include images of the student—Indiana has employed a series of security measures, such as a separate pass codes for each portfolio on a computer, to prevent the improper release or access to student work. *—DG*

by Kevin McDowell

Judicial Review

The Emergence of Complaint Investigations in Special Education: The Interpretation and Application of State Board Rules

Although Congressional enactments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its various incarnations never address complaint investigations by the state educational agency (SEA), there is increasing pressure to use the complaint investigation process to resolve not only issues once thought to be suitable for due process hearings, but to intercept requests for judicial review where compliance is the issue. These increased expectations by courts and federal agencies have served to blur the distinction between complaint investigations and due process hearings with sometimes unfortunate results—especially because the results of complaint investigations can affect policy and regulations across a state.

Background

IDEA, as a federal grant administered by each state, has required a complaint investigation process for a number of years, with the authority emanating from the Secretary of Education's general authority to engage in rule-making. Since 1992, the requirement to conduct such investigations has appeared in the federal IDEA regulations—but the extent of such investigations has changed dramatically.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has issued a number of clarification letters over the years, notably to halt a fairly common practice in the 1980s of referring complaints from parents that contained "hearing issues" to impartial hearing officers. In its letter to the State of Washington, OSEP advised the SEA that it is impermissible for a state to require parents to utilize the due process hearing procedures when the parents elected to use the complaint investigation process, "which for many parents [is] a less costly alternative to a due process hearing." This OSEP letter marks the genesis of the SEA complaint investigation process, which has now become more instrumental in affecting policies and procedures in states with relatively little notice. OSEP, in other clarification letters, acknowledges that the complaint investigation process and due process procedure are distinct processes with differing functions; however, an SEA cannot "have a procedure that automatically removes such complaints from the jurisdiction of its complaint management system until after a due process hearing is conducted.... [T]he SEA [is required] to resolve any complaint it receives, regardless of whether the complaint concerns a matter that is also an appropriate subject for a due process hearing under [IDEA]." OSEP reiterated the above and expanded upon the SEA's general supervisory responsibility in a 1994 Memorandum, but significant expansion did not occur until the federal regulations were issued in 1999.

Present Requirement

In March of 1999, the final regulations for IDEA were issued, implementing the 1997 Congressional reauthorization. Eliminated was the opportunity to seek Secretarial review of an SEA's final complaint investigation report (CIR). However, notice of the availability of the complaint process was to be expanded greatly while the authority to order corrective action, including the awarding of monetary reimbursement and compensatory educational services, was stated explicitly. The relationship between the complaint process and hearing procedure, where issues are presented simultaneously, was detailed, with the SEA required to defer to the hearing officer on issues under the hearing officer's jurisdiction but to investigate issues not presented in the hearing. In addition, a party could not mount a collateral attack against an unfavorable hearing decision by filing a complaint on the same issue. The hearing officer's decision is binding. Time limitations were also included, with a general one-year limitations period for most complaints (except where the issue involves a systemic one) and a three-year limitations period where compensatory services are sought for procedural violations.

OSEP expanded upon the revisions to the complaint investigation process in a far-ranging "Q&A" letter to chief state school officers. It reiterated its statement voiced earlier in its letter to the state of Washington that "An SEA is required to resolve *any* complaint" that meets the requirement of IDEA (emphasis original). This is misleading. Resolution of a complaint does not mean resolution to the satisfaction of a complainant, especially where the issue is not one that can be "resolved" through a complaint process (i.e., the appropriateness of a proposed or refused action by a public agency where there are no procedural anomalies). A parent reading OSEP's clarification would not likely appreciate the distinction OSEP makes:

> An SEA resolves a complaint challenging the appropriateness of a public agency's determination regarding a child's educational program or placement by determining not only whether the public agency has followed the required procedures to reach that determination, but also whether the public agency has reached a decision that is consistent with [IDEA] requirements.... The SEA may likely find that the public agency has followed required procedures, applied required standards, and reached a determination that is reasonably supported by the student-specific data.

Later, OSEP added that the SEA cannot overturn decisions of the IEP team, but it can order the IEP team to reconvene to address procedural lapses.[1] This raises unrealistic expectations that "hearing issues" can be resolved through the complaint process when such is not the case.

Judicial Review

This is further confused by OSEP's statement that complaint issues can be mediated. This can be problematic in that one typically does not mediate compliance issues. Compliance is usually negotiated, and it is agency-to-agency.[2]

In the Courts

Although states are to have complaint investigation processes coupled with an "effective enforcement mechanism," there have been lawsuits against states alleging that such processes are either ineffective or untimely. There has also been a tendency to extend adjudication principles to include the complaint investigation process.

Attorney Fees

Prior to the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, a federal district court determined that the complaint resolution process was a "proceeding" under that law, thus authorizing attorney fees for work performed in the furtherance of the complaint resolution process. The court relied upon language permitting the recovery of attorneys' fees "in any action or proceeding brought under this subsection," declining to restrict "proceeding" to a due process hearing. Essential in the court's analysis was wording in the law that stated "The procedures required by this section shall include, but not be limited to" the due process hearing procedure, indicating to a federal district court in Vermont that the complaint process was an additional procedure contemplated by IDEA.[3]

When Congress reauthorized IDEA in 1997, it altered the language the Vermont judge relied upon. In a 1999 case, the federal district court determined that the complaint investigation process is not an "action or proceeding" under IDEA and, thus, a prevailing party is not entitled to attorney fees. The court read the 1997 amendments, which left out the "but not be limited to" language, as limiting attorney fees to the due process hearing procedures referenced in Section 1415.[4] The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, however, reached a contrary conclusion, reading IDEA's current language as permitting a court to award such fees in "any ... proceeding" brought under Section 1415, even if it is not an "action." The court added that there "is more than one type of 'proceeding' in which a district court is authorized to award attorney fees," and that the word "any" "militates in favor of concluding that Congress intended that attorney fees could be awarded in cases involving complaint resolution procedures other than impartial due process hearings."

Exhaustion Requirement

IDEA requires that the administrative due process hearing procedures be exhausted before one resorts to judicial action. This may be excused under some circumstances, such as where a plaintiff can demonstrate that the hearing procedures would be futile. A district court recently applied the exhaustion requirement to the complaint process where the parents sought judicial intervention after succeeding at the administrative hearing level but the school allegedly did not comply with the hearing officer's orders. The court noted that the plaintiffs should have sought enforcement of the hearing decision through the SEA's complaint resolution process.

Rather than follow the administrative enforcement scheme, the plaintiffs elected to bypass this route and proceed directly to federal court. This Court will not excuse the plaintiffs from the requirement of exhausting administrative remedies before bringing their IDEA claim to federal court.

In another case, the parent sought to enforce a hearing officer's decision through the complaint resolution process. However, the district court did not recognize the SEA complaint investigation process as an IDEA "action or proceeding" and, accordingly, found the parents had not requested attorney fees in a timely fashion.

The Future

Notwithstanding the uncertainty in the courts—and created by the courts—in determining the precise nature of the SEA's complaint investigation process, there is little question that the relative importance of this process is increasing. For a state board of education, it is important because each complaint investigation report (CIR) is an interpretation and application of the state board's rules and regulations for special education and related services in that state. For affected public agencies and constituents, it is important to know how the SEA is interpreting and applying the state board's rules. For this reason, many SEAs are now posting on their respective websites important CIRs as a means of informing affected constituencies of these determinations. State board members should be informed as to how their rules are interpreted and applied. The next reauthorization is just around the corner.

Kevin McDowell is general counsel for the Indiana Department of Education and is currently the chair of the National Council of State Education Attorneys.

1. OSEP addressed the issue of hearing-versus-complaint later on in the letter, but not until Question 13 of 15 questions.
2. OSEP, in an as-yet unpublished "Letter to Anonymous" dated March 30, 2001, upheld the decision of the Oklahoma State Department of Education to decline to investigate a complaint filed by a plaintiff in a pending lawsuit with a local school district. OSEP stated that the SEA did not have to be a party to a lawsuit before it declined to investigate issues that were pending in a judicial forum.
3. At issue in this case was the lack of timeliness in the state's response to allegations that a school district's procedures were seriously deficient. Although IDEA requires such complaints be addressed in 60 days, except where extraordinary circumstances are present, the complaint investigation report did not issue for over eight months.
4. As noted previously, the statutory requirements that reflect Congressional enactments do not contain the complaint investigation process. This requirement, under IDEA, appears in the federal regulations.
5. Adapted from *The Complaint Investigator Training Manual*, © Great Lakes Area Regional Resource Center and Kevin C. McDowell.

Table 1. Complaint Investigation Compared with the Hearing Process

While the courts attempt to discern the differences between complaints and hearings, the following chart is helpful in comparing the relative procedures.[5]

THE COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION PROCESS	THE HEARING PROCESS
An investigation regarding issues of alleged non-compliance	An adjudication of rights
Can be initiated by anyone, including someone from out of state	Can be initiated by the parent, student (if 18 years old and competent), or public agency
Not subject to procedural requirements (i.e., subpoena, summary judgment, involuntary dismissal, testimony under oath/affirmation)	Subject to procedural requirements, including default, involuntary dismissal, summary judgment, testimony, and so on
Investigator is generally state employee	Adjudicator is third-party and impartial
Facts are usually determined through review documents or documentation and personal interviews rather than through testimony	Facts are determined through documentation and testimony presented at a formal proceeding
Credibility is not a factor	Credibility and demeanor are factors
Issues are addressed on an objective basis	Hearings have elements of subjectivity that require the exercise of individual judgment
Process may use many investigators	Process uses one hearing officer acting alone
Allegations involve technical violations	Issues often involve theoretical disputes or philosophical differences
Addresses legal requirements	Addresses appropriateness of proposed or refused actions in addition to legal requirements
Conclusions and Corrective Action will be consistent with state practice in the past and consistent with practice in the future, absent change in the law	Conclusions of Law and Orders are student-specific in nature and case-sensitive
The Conclusions should be same irrespective of the investigator	The Conclusions of Law may be different depending upon the adjudicator
Investigation report should be able to be applied across the state	Written decision is student-specific and does not establish precedent
Report may have a system-wide impact	Decision will affect only the student
Policy changes can be a direct result	Policy changes, if any, would be an indirect result
Reflects the decision of the state through the interpretation and application of state special education law	Reflects the independent decision of the Hearing Officer
Can be requested any time a person believes a special education law has not been followed, subject to IDEA time limits or state-specific guidelines	Can be requested by an identifiable group of persons after disagreement arises regarding the proposed or refused action of the public agency involving FAPE, LRE, evaluation, identification, reimbursement, or similar issues of appropriateness
Can correct the situation, determine educational service compensation, order reimbursement, and withhold funds for non-compliance	Can order appropriate services and programs, award compensatory educational services, award reimbursement
Attorney fees and costs are not generally available	Parents who ultimately prevail may recover attorney fees and costs

The Art of State Education Policymaking

Despite federal requirements to include students with disabilities in state and district assessments to the maximum extent possible—and to provide alternate assessments in cases where the standard assessment, even with accommodations, is not appropriate—some states are still seeing an unusually high number of students who have been exempted from these tests, as well as disappointing special education test scores. Such was the situation faced by one state board of education:

This board had approved the state's alternate assessment for students with disabilities in April 2000, just months before the federal deadline. The alternate assessment was based on the student successfully completing his or her Individual Education Plan (IEP). Though federal guidance for alternate assessments suggests that the vast majority of students with disabilities should be included in the general assessment, a recent report to the board showed that nearly half of students with disabilities were taking the alternate assessment. Furthermore, a review of the scores of those students with disabilities who took some form of the standard state assessment showed that they were significantly lower than those of the general student population.

Advocacy groups in the state were outraged by the test scores, saying that districts were not fulfilling their federal mandate to provide a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities. A new organization, Save Special Students from Educational Abuse (SSSEA) began calling on parents to push for publicly funded, private school placements as the only hope that their children would receive a decent education. The president of SSSEA met with state senate education committee chairman Bob Speaks, who has a child with a disability, and encouraged him to join the group. As a result, Chairman Speaks called the state board chair to ask what the board was going to do about the state's system of special education. Said Bob, "Not another penny will go to your new accountability package if those test scores don't go up!"

At its next meeting, the state board began to reexamine its policies regarding assessment and students with disabilities. During the study session, the board learned that a great deal had changed in the assessment of students with disabilities over the past few years. The board found, for example, that

- two-thirds of states now base alternate assessment on a portfolio, body of evidence, or checklist;
- the number of states basing alternate assessments on an analysis of the IEP had decreased to only three in 2001;
- eleven states no longer allow *any* exclusions from state testing; and
- half the states have included students with disabilities in all of their *accountability* systems as well as their assessment systems. In those states, policymakers have found that practitioners no longer have an incentive to exclude students with disabilities from testing or refer them to the alternate assessment in an attempt to exempt them from schools' average score reports.

Based on this information, the board felt it could address the low participation rates of students with disabilities by emulating the testing policies of other states.

Having addressed issues surrounding student assessment, it was now time to turn to the actual teaching and learning of students with disabilities. From the study session, the board knew that including students with disabilities in the accountability program would have a positive impact on ensuring that those students were included in the general curriculum. However, the board also reviewed the best practices literature in special education and noted research showing that students with disabilities who were educated with their non-disabled peers appeared to have greater skill acquisition than those who were educated in segregated settings. While the board had supported inclusive education for several years, it took this opportunity to see if policies in other areas precluded teachers from supporting students in inclusive settings.

Based on a policy audit, the board determined three additional policies that needed to be changed. The first was a policy stipulating that districts could only receive state reimbursement for teachers assigned to classes for which they were certified. This was having the unintended effect of discouraging co-teaching assignments among special and general education teachers in inclusive classrooms. The board amended the policy to provide for a range of staffing arrangements that supported small, heterogeneous groupings that were consistent with building restructuring plans. Furthermore, the board decided that it needed to broaden the definition of approved professional development activities to include site visits so that general and special education teachers could see inclusive classrooms at work. Finally, the board directed staff to put out guidance to the districts to remind them that special education funds could be used for the professional development of general education teachers so that they would be better able to teach all students.

By addressing the policy issues that led to high numbers of students with disabilities being referred to the alternative assessment, ensuring accountability for all students, and supporting teacher development in research-based best practice, the board soon saw increases in participation and tested achievement of students with disabilities. This, in turn, defused the SSSEA, and within six months new private school placements of students with disabilities were reduced.

Virginia Roach is deputy executive director of NASBE.

by Virginia Roach

The Challenge:

Making certain that all teachers are broadly educated.

- The New York State Board of Regents wanted to ensure that all newly certified public school teachers were well grounded in the liberal arts and sciences. They believed that all teachers should have a solid conceptual understanding of the fundamentals of science and math, the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. But they wanted to avoid imposing a test that was no more than a factual trivia contest.

The Answer:

A customized Liberal Arts and Sciences Test from NES.

- **National Evaluation Systems, Inc.** (NES®), responded to the challenge with a custom assessment that tests conceptual knowledge in four areas: scientific and mathematical processes, historical and social scientific awareness, artistic expression and the humanities, and communication skills. The examination incorporates a variety of test formats, including essays that require synthesis of ideas across the areas. For example, an examinee might be asked to write about the value of space exploration after reading stimulus materials that present arguments on different sides of the issue.
- The conceptual skills assessments were developed with the participation of committees of New York State school teachers and college faculty members. The written performance assessments are scored by specially trained New York State teachers.
- The New York State Liberal Arts and Science Test—an innovative approach to ensuring well-educated teachers.

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Stuart Kahl, President

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